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THE STORM, by A. Ostrovsky
A Play in Four Acts
English version by
G. F. Holland and Malcolm Morley

PLAYS OF THE EVERYMAN THEATRE GUILD

No. 2.

CHARLES AND MARY

A PLAY ON THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

By

JOAN TEMPLE

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LONDON

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"CHARLES AND MARY."

ORIGINALLY produced at the EVERYMAN THEATRE, London, February 4, 1930, and Transferred to the GLOBE THEATRE, February 28, 1930.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mary Lamb	JOAN TEMPLE
Charles Lamb	PETER RIDGEWAY
Mr. Lamb	HAROLD SCOTT
Mrs. Lamb	GERTRUDE STERROLL
Becky	DOROTHY HAMILTON
Jane	YVONNE RORIE
John Lamb	DOUGLAS BURBIDGE
William Godwin	PHILIP HATFIELD
Mrs. Godwin	WINIFRED EVANS
George Dyer	ANDREW LEIGH
Charles Dudley	WILFRED BABBAGE
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	DEERING WELLS
William Wordsworth	ALBERT E. RAYNOR
Hester Savory	JEAN SHEPEARD
Mrs. Bracebridge	ELSA HALL

Play produced by MALCOLM MORLEY.

PROLOGUE. *The Lambs' Lodgings at Edmonton*, 1832.

ACT I. *Scene* 1. *The Lambs' Lodgings, Little Queen Street, London. September*, 1796.
Scene 2. *The same. December*, 1796.

ACT II. *Professor Godwin's House in Somers Town. A Saturday evening in February*, 1800.

ACT III. *Scene* 1. *The Lambs' Lodgings at* 36, *Chapel Street, Pentonville. The following morning.*
Scene 2. *The same, some hours later.*

EPILOGUE. *The Scene of the Prologue.*

PROLOGUE

When CURTAIN RISES, CHARLES *and* MARY LAMB *are writing at a table* C. *There are candles on the table, but the rest of the room is in darkness. They both sit facing the audience,* CHARLES *to their left,* MARY *to their right.*

It is the winter of 1832–33. CHARLES *is fifty-seven,* MARY *sixty-seven.* MARY'S *dark eyes are hidden behind spectacles, and grey hair peeps out from under her mob-cap.*

CHARLES *looks up from his writing, his eyes widen in thought, then the lids droop as the thought is transformed into concrete words. He writes for a moment, then hesitates.*

MARY [*softly, diffident about interrupting him*]: Charles!

[HE *does not hear her. She gives him a look of gentle inquiry, then takes a scrap of paper and writes upon it twice, clearly testing the various spellings of a word. Having satisfied herself, she writes it in her manuscript.*]

CHARLES: What's t'troubling the old hen?

MARY: Nothing now.

CHARLES [*teasing her*]: I have a sorrow, sad to tell—my sister M'Mary cannot spell!

MARY: Indeed I can! It was only—well, I was just wondering how many m's there were in "immortality".

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Only two.

MARY [*disconcerted*]: Oh! That is very odd. It looks a more *immortal* word with *one*!

CHARLES [*gravely*]: Yes. I think you would achieve immortality, M'Mary, if you wrote it with only *one* m.

MARY: Well, I have done it now. Oh! I must make a little blot. [*Shakes her pen.*]

[CHARLES *writes again, then leans back.* MARY *bends over to read what he has written.*]

MARY [*reading*]: "This poor gentleman, who for some months had been in a declining way, hath at length paid his final tribute to nature. To say truth, it is time he were gone." Why, what is this, Charles?

[CHARLES *indicates the top of the page.*]

CHARLES: "Preface to the last 'Essays of Elia'."

MARY [*regretfully*]: Oh, is this the last of him, Charles?

CHARLES: Yes. An existence of two and a half years is a t'tolerable existence for a phantom. [*He leans forward to write this.*]

MARY [*musing*]: A phantom? He has seemed real enough.

CHARLES [*looking up*]: Half my life—*our* life, M'Mary—has gone to give him breath. Half my life—the dreams, the joys, the regrets. I have been trying to make literature out of the commonplace, and so doing I have created—a phantom.

MARY: There have been many who loved "Elia".

CHARLES: Yes. That is a fragrant tribute.

MARY: They will be as sorry as I am to see him go. [*Sighs.*] Ah well!

[*There comes the sound of a violin and piano playing "There is a Lady sweet and kind".*]

MARY [*listening*]: I think they have a musical party next door. Listen! A fiddle and the pianoforte. [*Listens again for a moment.*] You cannot tell me what they are playing, Charles!

CHARLES [*very quietly*]: Yes.

MARY: I don't think you can. Why, you never know one tune from another!

CHARLES [*as the music continues*]: "I did but see her passing by——" . . . Thirty years and more ago. [*The music ends.*] What a strange m'map a life makes when viewed from near its ending! Hills and valleys—parched lands and green pastures. A hint of a far-off beauty that never comes to earth. . . . I think the hardest lesson in life, M'Mary, is the acceptance of the commonplace. Yes, that is the hardest thing of all—*to accept the commonplace with fortitude, while Romance passes one by.*

[*The light slowly fades, the music starts again and continues until the light comes up on*

ACT I]

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Scene is the living-room of the Lambs' lodgings in Little Queen Street, London, early in the evening of September 21, 1796.

All directions throughout are given from the spectator's point of view.

To L., *back of the stage, is a low double window through which can be seen a tree in full leaf, all golden brown. This window faces West, and the setting sun fills the room with a rosy glow which is reflected by the stone-coloured panelling of the room. Towards the right of the back wall an uncurtained archway leads to the stairs.*

In the right-hand wall is a fireplace, but although the grate is empty Mrs. Lamb's arm-chair hugs it closely. Above the fireplace is a door. Below the fireplace another arm-chair faces that of Mrs Lamb. In the wall, below the fireplace, a horseshoe cupboard without a door displays a few pieces of the more valuable family china. Beneath this cupboard stands a small oak chest.

In the middle of the left wall is another door. Between window and archway stands a sideboard, with a chair to R. *of it. An arm-chair up near the window, a sofa down left, a table centre, with a chair on either side—these, with the articles already enumerated, make up the furniture of the room, and, with the coloured prints on the walls, convey that atmosphere of dignified simplicity which marks an age before the taste that maligns the middle years of Victoria was coupled with the flurry of Midland output.*

The Lambs are poor, but have always managed very respectably to keep their heads above water; and their household furnishings, which to us would have the self-consciousness of "antiques", are to them a collection of well-worn pieces which have become part and parcel of their environment.

In the chair on the left side of the table sits old JOHN LAMB, *tooling a cribbage-board and talking to himself as he does so.* MARY LAMB, *his daughter, is sitting opposite*

him, trying to utilize the little space he leaves her at the table for her business as a mantua-maker.

MARY *is at this time thirty-two, rather short, with wide brown eyes, which are at this present time ablaze with some hidden turbulence.*

JOHN LAMB *is now in his dotage, but still shows occasional signs of the humour and sprightliness which once formed so pronounced a part of his personality. He is below middle height, and* MARY *and* CHARLES *show many of his physical and mental traits, just as John, the elder son, resembles their mother.*

MRS. LAMB, *who is about seventy, is tall and stately. She sits in her chair rigid and erect, in spite of the fact that she is now an incurable invalid. She has often been told that she might have been a sister of Mrs. Siddons, and to this flattering thought she still clings—the little aftermath of vanity, coupled with her passion for her son John, constituting all of her present hold on painful life. She is reading from a volume of sermons reposing on her lap.*

MR. LAMB [*as he works*]: This will be—this will be—the best cribbage-board that ever I made. I won't give it away. I won't sell it. I will keep it for—yes—I will keep it for myself. Dear, dear, dear, dear! Oh *yes*—dear, dear, dear, dear!

MRS. LAMB: I wish you would give over talking to yourself, Mr. Lamb.

MR. LAMB: I was *not* talking to myself, my good woman. I was—yes—I was *thinking* to myself.

MRS. LAMB: And giving us the benefit of your thoughts. So you see, Mr. Lamb, you are not telling the truth when you say you are not talking to yourself!

MR. LAMB [*mildly*]: Betsy, my dear, I know if I answer you back we shall have an argument about religion. And I—I don't know how it is, but when you argue about religion, Mrs. Lamb, you are sometimes very rude to me. And I—I dare not be rude in *my* turn, because you seem to think that *that* is but another sin in me.

MRS. LAMB: I do not——

MR. LAMB [*even more mildly*]: Oh yes, you do, my dear. You good people take us at a great disadvantage. I am a mild man, my love, but when you begin to talk about religion, you make me feel a regular devil!

MRS. LAMB: You are an ungodly man, John. [*Dropping her needleworked bookmarker.*]

MR. LAMB [*looking at her and speaking still more mildly*]: Betsy—I have been so busy—all my life—making you a *good* husband, that it is only now I realize how much *more* you'd have appreciated me if I'd been a *bad* one.

MRS. LAMB [*imperiously*]: Mary! Pick up my bookmarker.

[MARY, *with a stifled sigh, rises and picks up the bookmarker. With her hand to her head, she stands looking pleadingly from her father to her mother during the following*]:

MRS. LAMB [*drawing breath for her sermon*]: *Mr. Lamb*——

[*This starts* MR. LAMB *talking to himself in order to ignore his wife without acknowledged rudeness, and the two proceed to talk together.*]

MRS. LAMB: I think you are a man without any religion. Whatever goodness you may pride yourself upon, it comes to this—nothing—a breath—as though it had never been. When you stand at the Bar of Judgment and maintain that you have done nothing but good, you will be told that it is better to be wicked and believe than to be good without belief. For "there were ninety-and-nine . . ."

MR. LAMB: You know, I never enjoyed making a cribbage-board so much in all my life. Now I always pride myself on my cribbage-boards, and my friends tell me that they cannot buy a cribbage-board that will equal one made by me. But there has always been some secret fault—known only to myself! But this will be the best cribbage-board that ever I made. The markings will . . .

[MARY'S *hand goes to her mouth as she tries not to cry out in protest. Quietly at first, she breaks in on them, but they do not hear her, so that her voice is merely added to their duet.*]

MARY: If you *please*! Father! Mother! [*Suddenly she shouts, which causes her parents to break off in astonishment.*] *Please! I cannot bear it!* [*With a look of shamed apology she returns to her place.*]

MRS. LAMB [*recovering from her astonishment*]: Mary! I'm surprised at you! Go to your room!

MARY: What is the use of telling me to go to my room, Mother? You know I must finish this pelisse for Mrs. Goodman by to-night; and there's the dinner to get—and—oh, I wish Charles would come! I wish Charles would come!

MRS. LAMB: You must have patience, Mary.

MR. LAMB [*who has paid no heed to the foregoing*]: Mary—ah yes, Mary—I——[*Searching among his tools.*] Yes, I—I left my fret-saw—the—yes—the *little* one—in the bedroom. Yes—I remember now—I *did* leave it in the bedroom—because I said to myself, "I shall not need this—no—not this little fret-saw—so I—I will leave it in the bedroom." Yes, I remember quite clearly—I left it on the chair—because I said to myself, "I will leave it on the chair—I-will-leave-it-on-the-chair." Go and fetch it for me, Mary!

MARY [*who has been restless during the foregoing, now brushes her hand across her eyes, as she answers with scarcely controlled impatience*]: Surely—surely you can manage without it, Father! My head is troubling me so—and I—I'm very busy!

MR. LAMB: So am I, *very* busy. Making a fine cribbage-board. Go and get—[*vaguely*] get—er—what I asked you for, Mary.

[MARY, *biting her lip, rises and puts her work down on chair up* R., *then goes out* R. *She has no sooner gone than* MR. LAMB *picks up a fret-saw from the table.*]

MR. LAMB: Did I—did I ask for my little fret-saw? Fancy! Fancy that, now! Why, here it is!

[*Enter* BECKY. *She is a rough-and-ready, domineering woman about thirty. She is squat and dark, with a faint darkness about the corners of her upper lip. She speaks with a country burr. She is carrying a basket.* BECKY *is as impervious to snubs as she is insensitive in giving offence.*]

BECKY [*jovially, pausing in the archway*]: Well, well! Yere I be agen, like a bad ole penny!

MR. LAMB [*quietly*]: I wish it wasn't always the *same* penny!

[BECKY *brings down chair.*]

BECKY [*seating herself on* MARY's *work, obviously out for a gossip*]: Ah, what a one for a joke you are, Mr. Lamb! Well, marm, and 'ow be *you*? I just met Mr. Charles in the street, and 'e said 'e were 'urrying for the doctor, so I saz to myself, "That be for poor ole Mrs. Lamb," I saz.

MRS. LAMB [*snubbing her curiosity*]: Mr. Charles was not fetching the doctor for *me*, Becky.

BECKY [*rather floored*]: Oh! I did try to ask 'im 'oo the doctor was for—being very sympathetic to you all——

MR. LAMB [*chuckling to himself*]: Sympathy is a nice name for poking your nose into everybody's pie!

BECKY: Oh, I ben't one to be curious, if that's your meaning, sir. [*To* MRS. LAMB.] But come to look at you, you *do* look peeky, marm. I don't think as 'ow you'll see the spring, I don't really.

MRS. LAMB: I'm well enough——

BECKY: Can't be "well enough" if you be 'alf paralysed! Poor Mr. Charles! He was looking tar'ble tired! But 'e be the prop and stays o' *this* 'ome, an' that's no more'n the truth. And so the doctor wan't for *you*, marm?

MRS. LAMB [*not without quite enjoyment of the game*]: So I have informed you, Becky.

BECKY [*floored, then taking heart again*]: I 'opes as Mr. John's leg be no worse?

MRS. LAMB: No—much better, thank you.

BECKY: Ah! [*To* MR. LAMB.] And *you* be feeling quite yourself, sir?

MR. LAMB [*with a glint of mischief*]: Ah—'tis that that's killing me.

BECKY [*eagerly*]: *What* is, sir?

MR. LAMB: Feeling quite myself. If I could feel like someone else, I'd be a new man!

BECKY: Oh—then *you* ben't in need of the doctor?

MR. LAMB: No, my good woman, I am *not*.

BECKY: And 'ow's Miss Mary?

MRS. LAMB [*ignoring this*]: How is your mistress, Becky?

BECKY: Oh, Mrs. Goodman be well enough. I 'opes as 'ow Miss Mary do be gettin' on with her pelisse.

MRS. LAMB [*casually*]: Oh yes.

BECKY: 'Cos if it ben't finished by to-night, Miss Mary'll get a flea in 'er ear from the Widow! My! She *be* a cross-grained ole bitch!

MRS. LAMB: That is not the way to talk of your mistress, Becky!

BECKY: P'raps not, marm—but 'tis naught to the way I thinks of'n. I wish I could find another situation!

MRS. LAMB: Ah, they're mighty hard to come by these days.

BECKY: And you'd think as 'ow folks 'ud be pleased to 'ave a strong, capable, good-looking wench like me to serve'n.

MRS. LAMB: You are too rough-and-ready for the *best* families, Becky.

BECKY: I wish I was working for *you*, marm. It's almost like being 'ome again—you coming from my part of the country, and me knowing Mrs. Field, your mother——

[*Re-enter* MARY R.]

MARY: Father, I've looked everywhere for that fret-saw——

MR. LAMB: Dear, dear—and it was on the table all the time!

MARY: Oh, Father, how could you hinder me so! [*To* BECKY.] Has the Widow Goodman sent you in about her pelisse?

BECKY: No, me dear—but she be expecting it by to-night, I can tell you *that.*

MARY [*looking round for her needlework*]: Where did I put it?

BECKY [*lazily*]: When did 'ee 'ave it last?

MARY [*impatiently*]: *Here*—working at the table.

BECKY [*glancing under the table*]: Well, I can't see it now!

MARY [*holding her head*]: Oh dear, oh dear! Everything contrives to hinder me. [*Her impatience growing.*] Where is it? Where is it?

MRS. LAMB: Did you take it into t'other room?

MARY: No—that I know I did *not*!

BECKY: Be it nearly finished?

MARY: Not by a very long way.

BECKY: Well, the dame will want it by to-night—or 'er won't 'ave it at all.

MARY [*wringing her hands*]: Where is it? Dear, dear, dear! Where is it?

BECKY: You go and look in t'other room, and I'll 'ave a good look in 'ere.

[MARY *hastens off* R.]

BECKY [*giving a cursory look round, without rising*]: *I* can't see it anywhere, can *you*, marm?

MRS. LAMB [*indifferently*]: No.

[MARY *hastens back.*]

MARY: Of course it isn't there! [*Holding her head.*] Oh, where *can* it be?

BECKY [*rising*]: Now don't go upsetting of yourself—it's bad for you——

[MARY *suddenly screams as she catches sight of her work on the chair.*]

MARY: Why, you silly creature—you've been sitting on it all the time!

BECKY: Fancy that now! Why, I might 'ave sat on the needle. A miracle I didn't!

MARY: Oh, go away, for goodness' *sake*, Becky!

BECKY [*in a huff*]: Oh, very well, Miss Mary. [*To* MRS. LAMB.] I'll say good afternoon, marm. I only come in to inquire 'oo the doctor were for.

MRS. LAMB: Very good of you, Becky. *Good* afternoon.

[BECKY *curtsies, gives* MARY *a look and a toss of her head, then goes out hastily.*]

MARY [*with a moan, as she holds up her crumpled work*]: Look at the havoc she's made of this! It will take me an extra half-hour to iron it out. [*Clasping her head and swaying a little.*] Oh, my poor head! My poor head!

[*She drops her work into her chair, and then goes quickly to* MRS. LAMB. *Throwing herself on her knees beside her, she puts her head in her mother's lap.*]

MARY: Mother! Oh Mother, comfort me a little!

[MRS. LAMB *looks down at her with a frigid look of misunderstanding.*]

MRS. LAMB: You talk like a child, Mary, instead of a grown woman. Come, come, get up, my dear—get up!

[MARY, *made embarrassed and awkward by the rebuke, stumbles to her feet and goes back to her chair.*]

MARY [*with a stifled sob*]: I—I think Charles is the only one who cares for me!

MRS. LAMB: What nonsense you do talk, Mary!

[JANE, MARY'S *apprentice, a gawky girl of fifteen, comes slouching in through the archway. She is a sloven in body and mind.*]

MARY [*anxiously*]: Well, Jane, have you bought right this time?

[JANE *makes a snuffling noise that might be taken for assent. She brings out of the shabby satin bag she carries a length of red braid, at sight of which* MARY *gives a wail of distress and impatience.*]

MARY: Lord's sake, girl, are you colour-blind? Here do I sit waiting for the braid to finish Mrs. Goodman's pelisse, and this is the second time you make a mistake. Where is the pattern I gave you?

JANE [*indifferently*]: Oh. Oh, I have it—[*sniff*] somewheres.

MARY: Then why could you not match it, girl? Oh, you will drive me out of my few poor wits if you cannot manage better than this! Give me the pattern—then I'll show you how little it matches with this braid you've bought me.

JANE [*making no effort to produce the braid*]: Oh. Oh, well then—d'ye want me to go back to the shop?

MARY: And bring yet another braid that will not match! [*Impatiently.*] Give me the pattern, girl!

JANE: Oh! [*Listlessly, as though she has never heard of it before.*] The pattern?

MARY [*trying to control her temper*]: Yes. *Give me the pattern!*

JANE [*casually*]: Lost it.

MARY: When?

JANE: Oh—when first I went.

MARY: Why could you not have told me and saved the waste of my time?

JANE [*as though the thought had not occurred to her*]: Oh!

MARY: For God's sake, Jane, get a little sense into your head!

[JANE *yawns in her face.*]

Oh, what am I to do with you?

JANE: *I* don't know.

MARY: I shall have to *pay* for the braid you've bought wrong, and we can so ill afford it. [*Tears off a small piece of the material.*] Here, now—here is another pattern. And oh, do take care to match it, and hurry back!

JANE [*casually*]: All right.

MARY: Oh dear, oh dear! I shall be late with this pelisse of Mrs. Goodman's, and she's such a bad-tempered creature.

JANE [*showing signs of intelligence*]: *I* think she's a painted old trollop!

MARY [*gasping at her dilatoriness*]: Run, Jane, run!

JANE [*as she saunters off*]: Oh!

MARY [*as* JANE *goes out*]: God, let me keep my wits—let me keep my wits!

MR. LAMB: Mary—when you went into the bedroom, did you see—ah! now what *is* it I've lost?

MARY: Father dear, you have lost nothing. Give me leisure to get on with my work. I must finish it by to-night or I shall not be paid for it.

MR. LAMB: Well—I only—only thought I had lost something. Oh, Mary——

MARY: Yes, Father?

MR. LAMB: Had you not better be getting the dinner? I think it is time we had our dinner.

MARY [*trying to steady her twitching mouth with her nervous fingers*]: Not yet, Father. Not yet.

MR. LAMB: Well, I have no wish to hurry you, but—but I am sure you don't realize how late it is!

MARY: Yes, I do, Father. That is why I must hasten with my work!

[*She tries to regain her self-control so that her nervousness shall not spoil her sewing.*

After a moment JOHN LAMB *enters through the archway. He is about thirty-three, tall, broad, and portly, with a joviality that is described as vulgar by those who dislike him. He is using a stick and walks with a pronounced limp.*

MRS. LAMB'S *face lights up into humanity as soon as she hears the approach of her elder son.*]

JOHN [*mopping his brow*]: Lord, it's hot! No one would think we were late in September. I think there is thunder about.

MRS. LAMB: How far did you get, dear John?

JOHN [*limping towards her*]: No farther than the end of the street.

MRS. LAMB: And how does the poor leg feel, now that you have tried taking the air with it?

[JOHN, *when he speaks, is as loud-voiced as usual, which causes* MARY'S *hand to go swiftly to her head.*]

JOHN [*kissing his mother lightly on the forehead*]: A great deterrent from enjoyment, to say the least—and very painful, to say a little more.

MRS. LAMB: My dear, my dear, you should not have

gone abroad that windy night. Why, it was blowing a hurricane!

JOHN: *Ten* hurricanes!

MRS. LAMB: I begged you not to go, you remember.

JOHN: Oh, no harm in being out in a high wind. But who would have bargained for a stone falling out of the sky and wellnigh smashing my leg, eh? Well, well, well, we are a house of broken crocks these days, it seems. Has the doctor been, Mary?

MARY [*with bent head*]: No, John. Charles has gone to look for him.

MR. LAMB [*eagerly*]: Come and sit down, John. You come and sit beside me and watch me make my cribbage-board.

MRS. LAMB: No, John. [*Indicating arm-chair on the other side of the fireplace.*] Sit here. It is more comfortable for you.

MARY [*impatiently*]: Why doesn't Jane come back?

JOHN: I saw her playing with the boys in the street.

MARY: And I begged her to hurry!

JOHN [*dropping into arm-chair below fireplace*]: Oh, you must have a little patience with her, Mary.

MARY: Patience! Merciful heavens! This is the third time she has gone on the same errand, and I need her here to bind my seams. The work will never be done this night, and we shall lose the money, and we need it badly enough in all conscience!

JOHN: Well, while you wait for her, you might get me my pipe, Mary. It is in my bedroom.

MARY: I—I am very busy, John, even so.

JOHN: Oh, come, come, to fetch my pipe will cost you but a minute.

[*Without a word,* MARY *puts down her work and goes off into the bedroom* L.]

JOHN: Mother, I declare you look more like the great Mrs. Siddons every day.

MRS. LAMB: My son, you flatter me! [*As though it concerns her but little.*] Mary says her head is very bad, John.

JOHN [*casually*]: Oh, she thinks too much about herself.

MRS. LAMB [*emphatically*]: Yes; that is what I tell her, John.

[MARY *returns with a long "churchwarden", which she takes over to* JOHN.]

JOHN: And the bacca? Oh, did you not bring the bacca? What is the use of a pipe without the bacca?

[MARY'S *head gives a nervous shake, as though without her volition.*]

MARY: Oh, yes. [*Goes towards door again.*]

JOHN: I want the Orinooko—in the black canister, Mary. I forget where I put it, but you will see it there somewhere.

[MARY *goes out again.*]

JOHN [*to his mother*]: Mary must use more common sense about her work. She should not promise people to let them have their fallals by any certain time—— [*Breaks off as Mary returns.*] Ah, thank 'ee, Mary.

MRS. LAMB: It is wrong in you to smoke your pipe on an empty stomach, John dear. Wait until after dinner.

JOHN [*stretching up to put pipe on the mantelpiece*]: Yes; you are right, Mother. When will dinner be ready, Mary?

MARY [*who has resumed her work, speaking with ill-controlled sharpness*]: You cannot have your dinner yet. I am behindhand with my work, and none of you will let me finish it.

MR. LAMB: Yes, John. I keep reminding her about the dinner, but she takes no notice.

MARY [*jumping to her feet and stamping her foot, as she regards them all like an animal at bay*]: Give me a little peace! I—I insist that you give me a little peace!

[*There is a silence on the part of the others, which each expresses in a different way as being one of annoyance.*

Then CHARLES *enters through the archway. He is at this time about twenty-two, and is the exact opposite of his brother John. He is somewhat below middle height, with curling black hair and brown eyes. From*

Talfourd's description of him we learn that the nose was "slightly curved and delicately carved at the nostril. Deep thought, striving with humour; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweetness. . . . His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterized by what he himself says in one of his letters of Braham: 'a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.'" The slightly Jewish cast of his features is remarked on by another writer, but there is a picture by Hazlitt of Charles Lamb, painted in the dress of a Venetian Senator, which—quite apart from the suggestion offered by the costume—leads one to imagine that Lamb, with his strongly marked features and dark complexion, might have looked native to any of the portraits tucked into Italian canvases of the Holy Family. His clothes are of a sombre grey, which fact causes him to be often mistaken for a Quaker; his walk is slow and somewhat flat-footed. When he speaks, it is with a slight stammer.

MARY *runs to him and throws her arms about him as though he is her only refuge.*]

MARY: Charles!—Oh, Charlie, do you bring the doctor?

[CHARLES *puts his arm about her shoulders.*]

CHARLES: He is away from home, M'Mary. But they expect him back this evening, they said. I left word he was to come at once.

[MARY *looks up at him with a smile of gratitude.*]

MARY: Thank you, Charles.

CHARLES: Does the head hurt much, dear Mary?

MARY [*nodding*]: Yes.

CHARLES [*in a low voice*]: C'courage, sw-eetheart!

MR. LAMB [*who has taken no notice of this passage*]: Mary—I—yes—I would like to try my pegs in this—this new cribbage-board. Yes—I—yes—I *should* like to try the pegs. Mary—go and get the pegs. They may be in the bedroom.

CHARLES: I'll go, Mary. [*Goes off* R.]

MARY [*to herself*]: What keeps that girl so long? Why don't she come? Oh, 'tis all of a piece!

JOHN: It is a very fine sunset.

MRS. LAMB [*who is too stately to turn her head*]: Ah! I cannot see it from here.

JOHN: Help mother over to the window, Mary. Then she can see the sunset. It is well worth watching.

[MARY, *fighting for self-control, rises and goes to her mother.* MRS. LAMB *puts out her arms, but either cannot or will not make any effort to raise herself.*

CHARLES *returns with a cribbage-board, but seeing* MARY *trying to lift her mother, thrusts it into his pocket.*]

CHARLES: Let me help you, Mary. Now then, Mother—pull yourself up!

[MRS. LAMB *is raised heavily to her feet.*]

JOHN [*watching the operation*]: Hooray! Why, Mother, you are getting quite sprightly.

CHARLES [*gaily, for* MARY'S *sake*]: Y-es—q'quite sprightly, eh?

MR. LAMB [*impatiently*]: Did you find the *pegs*, Charlie?

CHARLES [*as he helps* MRS. LAMB *over to the window, playing on his stutter*]: P'pegs are in my p'p'pocket!

MR. LAMB: Good boy! I'll try the pegs—yes—try the pegs to see—yes—to see if the holes are big enough for the pegs. And then—*dinner!*

[CHARLES *and* MARY *have by this time seated* MRS. LAMB *in the arm-chair up at the window with her back half turned from the audience.*]

JOHN: Bravo, Mother! A most commendable feat. Most commendable. By Jove, you've filled me with such admiration that I must try to walk without my stick.

[*He lodges stick against his chair and rises, limping over to the sofa* L. *During this* CHARLES *gives the cribbage-board to his father.*]

JOHN [*as he limps, half in jest and half in earnest*]: Ooch!—ooh-ah! Ow-w! I'll not be rid of this trouble for many a long day. Ooh-ah-ow! *Ah!* [*Sinks on to sofa with a gusty sigh of relief.*] Now then, Mary, how about dinner? 'Tis nearly five.

MARY [*who is back at table—angrily*]: I will get you your dinner, John, if you will finish my needlework. Whether your stomach is more important than our purse, it is for you to judge!

CHARLES: I'll go and see how it is getting on.

JOHN: Good Charles! [*Taking newspaper from his pocket and beginning to read.*]

[*Exit* CHARLES R.]

MARY [*still angry*]: Yes. "Good Charles! Good boy, Charles!" You forget he is tired and—and not very strong. But Charles, like me, must be at the beck and call of everybody. And small thanks do either of us get for it that *I* can see. It's "Good boy, Charles!" if anybody wants anything done for them, but always—oh, *always* "*dear John!*"

MR. LAMB: *Dear* John! Yes, always "Dear John!" The pegs fit, boy, most excellent. I—I will leave this new cribbage-board to *you*, dear John.

MARY: But it is always *Charles* who has to play cribbage with you, Father!

MRS. LAMB: Do not speak to your father in that manner, Mary. Your head may pain you, but that is no reason why you should show disrespect to your parents.

MARY [*brushing her hand across her forehead*]: I am very sorry, Mother. I am sorry I spoke in haste, Father.

MR. LAMB: What did you say, Mary? Oh, I see! Yes, the pegs fit excellent well.

[CHARLES *returns, bringing in a tray with knives, forks, and glasses, which he places on sideboard.*]

CHARLES: I've poked the potatoes with a fork. They ought to be ready in five m'minutes. I will lay the table, Mary, while you finish your mantle.

MARY: No, Charles, you are tired. You sit down in that arm-chair.

[CHARLES *hesitates, and* MARY *is again exasperated.*]

MARY [*stamping her foot*]: Oh, do as I tell you!

[CHARLES, *with a soothing touch on* MARY'S *arm, goes to chair below fireplace and sits.* MARY *gathers her*

work together and takes it over to the sideboard. She opens drawer and takes out a tablecloth.]

MARY [*during this*]: Now then, Father, move your things from the table, or you cannot have your dinner.

MR. LAMB [*not taking in her meaning*]: Dinner? [*Crowing.*] Dinner! Ah yes, yes, yes—I am ready for it!

MARY: Then move your tools from the table.

[MR. LAMB *sits back in his chair and folds his hands across his stomach with a beatific smile.*]

MR. LAMB: Dinner!

JOHN [*peremptorily*]: Now, sir, take your tools from the table!

MR. LAMB [*understanding at last what is required of him*]: Ah yes—*yes*, to be sure. I must clear my work from the table, or—yes—or we cannot have our dinner.

[MR. LAMB *rises and gathers wood and tools in his arms, dropping some of them, which* MARY *has to pick up for him.*]

MR. LAMB [*during this*]: To be sure! To be sure!

MARY [*as she picks up the last of the fallen tools*]: Here you are, Father. Please do not drop any more. [*Proceeds to lay the cloth.*]

MR. LAMB [*going to fireplace and depositing some of his tools in the arm-chair*]: I have a secret—a secret that nobody knows. [*Turning with some of the tools in his arm, he puts his finger to the side of his nose and closes his left eye.*] It's—*dumplings for dinner!*—ah-ha!—dumplings for dinner!

[*As* MARY *is laying the cloth,* MR. LAMB *brings back some of his tools and deposits them on the table.* CHARLES *is sitting thinking, so does not notice this; but* JOHN *watches the proceedings with a smile.* MRS. LAMB *sits watching the sunset, wrapped in thought.*]

MARY [*exasperated*]: Lord's sake, Father, why must you bring these back again when I'm laying the table? Take them away! [*Banging on the table with her clenched fists.*] *Take them away!*

CHARLES [*springing to his feet*]: Let me help you, Mary!

JOHN: Oh, Lord, there seems to be an almighty lot of fuss about getting a simple meal!

[CHARLES *goes to* JOHN.]

CHARLES [*suddenly angry*]: Why can't you have a little p'patience, John? You—you can see how harassed M'Mary is! Why don't you let her alone?

[MARY *brings glasses to table.*]

JOHN [*laying down the law*]: Well, dinner-time is dinner-time, and I dislike the routine of the home being interfered with!

CHARLES: While you do nothing yourself to help m'matters on!

JOHN: This is a woman's job.

CHARLES: For Heaven's sake, let Mary alone! You know she isn't well! And yet you all try to worry her to death! I *will* have her treated with more consideration.

MRS. LAMB: When you remember your manners, Charles, please get me my medicine. Mary would seem to have forgot it.

[MARY *brings down knives and forks, but seems unable to place them correctly.*]

CHARLES: But I must help M'Mary——

MRS. LAMB [*bearing him down*]: Ten drops—not more, remember! And let each one combine with the water before you drop in the next.

CHARLES [*torn between Mary and his mother*]: But Mother——

MRS. LAMB: At once, Charles. The chymist said it was of great importance that I should take the drops some fifteen minutes before I feed.

CHARLES [*after a glance at* MARY]: Yes, Mother.

[*Goes off* L.]

[MR. LAMB *wanders back to table.* MARY *takes her father by the shoulders and swings him into the arm-chair below fireplace.*]

MARY: Now do sit down and keep quiet, Father, or you will get no dinner, I assure you!

MR. LAMB: Do not be angry, Mary—do not be angry!

MRS. LAMB: Your father and I are old, Mary. You seem to forget that.

MARY [*distraught*]: I think—I think you are all trying to drive me mad! [*The word "mad" frightens her, and because it frightens her she repeats it below her breath.*] Mad! Oh, dear God!

MRS. LAMB: Ah well, I wish I had the use of my limbs—then I would trouble no one. But I will have respect, Mary! Why, if I had spoken to *my* parents as you choose to speak to your father and me, I should have been beaten black and blue—and with justice! [*Her regal tone is intensified.*

During this, MARY *stands clinging to the table, biting her thumb to keep herself from screaming.*]

BECKY [*off*]: Miss Mary! Miss Mary!

[MARY *looks wildly round, as though trying to place the direction of the call.*

BECKY *comes hastening in through archway.*]

BECKY: The Widow Goodman's respects, Miss Mary, and 'er must 'ave 'er pelisse at once. 'Er's wanting it bad.

MARY [*angrily*]: It is not ready!

BECKY: Well, I don't know what I am to say to 'er. She's that angry—and she'll visit 'er anger on *me*, if I don't take it back with me.

MARY [*half crying*]: That I can't help! You come here, hindering me—sitting on my work like that——

BECKY: Well, I'm sure I'm sorry. But—what am I to say to her?

MARY: Say—say—oh, God knows! Beg her to give me a couple of hours. I'll do my best to have it done. In a couple of hours, tell her!

BECKY [*dubiously*]: Very well, my dear. [*At the exit.*] When she sees me come back without it, she'll smack my face—I know she will!

MARY: I'd sooner have my face slapped than lose my money!

BECKY [*smiling*]: Good evening, Mr. John!

JOHN: Evening, Becky. Tell the Widow Goodman she ought to be thinking of her shroud instead of pelisses!

BECKY [*with a smirk*]: I'll tell her that—from *you*, sir! [*Hastens off, screaming with laughter, which causes* MARY *to wince with pain.*]

JOHN [*calling after her*]: Oh no, *no!* [*Laughs loudly.*]

MARY [*bringing her needlework down in haste to the table*]: What shall I do? What shall I do? I can't do everything!

JOHN [*cheerfully*]: Oh, you give us our dinner, Mary—then you'll be free to get your work done.

MR. LAMB: Yes, yes! We want our dinner! We want our dinner! [*Rising and chanting merrily.*]

MARY: Oh, be quiet, Father! For mercy's sake!

[JANE *comes slouching in through the archway and bangs the braid down on the table.*]

MARY: Oh, Jane, you wicked girl! What a time you've been!

JANE [*cheekily, as though she knows it will annoy*]: I saw Mrs. Goodman at her door, and she says to tell you she is angry she ha'n't yet had her pelisse, and if she don't have it within the hour she'll not want it.

MARY [*shouting*]: The Devil take the woman!

MRS. LAMB [*shocked*]: *Mary!*

MARY [C. *below table, trying with trembling fingers to unscrew the packet of braid*]: Have you bought right *this* time, Jane?

JANE [*casually*]: 'Twas all they 'ad, anyway—so it must be right.

MARY [*thrusting unopened packet into* JANE'S *hands and indicating the work on table*]: Take your braid and match it to the pelisse.

[MARY *stands holding her head, while* JANE *opens packet and compares braid with pelisse.*]

JOHN [*during this*]: Come along, Mary! Do not bother about that now. Let's have our dinner!

MR. LAMB [*chanting and beating the arms of his chair*]: We want our dinner! We want our dinner!

MARY: Oh, be quiet! Be quiet! Well, Jane? Well?

JANE [*swiftly hiding braid and pelisse behind her back*]: Oh! Looks well enough.

JOHN [*angrily*]: Oh, to Gehenna with Mrs. Goodman! For goodness' sake, Mary, let's have our dinner!

MR. LAMB: Dinner! Dinner!

MARY [*distraught and heartbroken*]: Show me the braid! In God's name, show me the braid!

[JANE *sullenly discloses a most horrid match.*

With a scream, MARY *falls back against the table, her hand coming into contact with a knife.*]

MARY: Fool! You fool!

[MARY, *snatching up the knife, in her frenzy makes a rush for* JANE, *who, terrified into life and screaming, dashes round the table and out through the archway.*

As MARY *passes him,* JOHN *tries to catch her by her skirts, but she is too quick for him.* MRS. LAMB, *who is in* MARY'S *path, tries to rise.*]

MRS. LAMB: Mary! For God's sake! You're mad!

[*The word "mad" severs* MARY'S *last link with sanity, and, utterly unconscious of what she is doing, she strikes her mother to the heart.*

Horrified, MR. LAMB *springs to his feet and up to* MRS. LAMB, *who has fallen back in her chair.*]

JOHN [*as he also rushes to* MRS. LAMB]: Help! Charles! Help!

[MARY, *dropping the knife, runs above chair and down stage, wild-eyed and aimless.*

CHARLES *hastens on from* L., *and, taking in the scene at a glance, runs to* MARY. *As she sees him, she gives a loud cry.*]

MARY: Charles!

[*A light breaks in upon her deranged mind, and a look of horror and realization comes into her eyes. Then she falls sobbing into* CHARLES'S *arms.*

There comes a double-knock at the door below.]

JOHN [*in a hushed whisper*]: The doctor—but, oh God!—he comes too late. Mother—is dead!

CHARLES [*clasping* MARY *to him, as though during the avenging Fates to take her from him*]: *Oh, my poor Mary!* My poor M'Mary!

END OF SCENE I

SCENE 2

The Scene is the same as that of Scene 1, *on an evening in December of the same year. The curtains are undrawn, and the tree outside is bare and snow-laden. The snow is still falling.*

The fire is burning brightly, and in front of it is a brass "footman" on which stands a covered dish. A pair of slippers is warming in the fender.

In the arm-chair above the fireplace, old MR. LAMB *is sitting dozing.* BECKY *is standing by window.*

The room is lit by candles.

BECKY [*as she looks out*]: Mercy on us, what a night!

MR. LAMB [*waking with a start*]: Eh? What's that? What's that?

BECKY [*drawing the curtains*]: I said as 'twere a dreadful night. 'Tis snowing 'ard. Poor Mr. Charles's boots will be a rare sight to the dubbin-brush! And they'm *thin*, too. My, I wonder 'e keep body and soul together—always giving up something needful to somebody else. [*During this, she has come down to the fire, and kneeling, takes cover off the dish. Clicking with her tongue.*] T't, t't, t't! His dinner's getting quite spoilt. And small wonder! It's been ready since half-past four.

MR. LAMB: What's been ready?

BECKY: Mr. Charles's dinner. And now it's after nine! They do work 'im that 'ard——

MR. LAMB: Is that—is that *my* dinner?

BECKY: Your dinner, indeed! When your stomach's bursting the top button off your waistcoat! It's *Mr. Charles's* dinner. [*Replacing cover on dish.*]

MR. LAMB: Then—then why doesn't he eat it?

BECKY [*impatiently*]: Because he's working late at the East India House. It's near Christmas.

MR. LAMB: Is it Christmas? Ah yes, same to you, my dear, and many of 'em!

BECKY [*intolerantly, half aloud*]: Oh, you poor loony!

[*Aloud.*] It isn't Christmas *yet*, Mr. Lamb. But it's near enough to mean a lot of extra work for poor Mr. Charles.

MR. LAMB [*beginning to snivel*]: He ought to be home—he knows I like my game of cribbage. Why doesn't he come?

[BECKY *goes to the sideboard, and from it takes a table-cloth, a knife and a fork, which she places on the table.*]

BECKY [*during this*]: I keep telling you, sir, Mr. Charles be working late.

MR. LAMB [*shaking and crying*]: Nobody takes any notice of me nowadays. Left to myself—utterly—utterly neglected. Where's Mary?

[BECKY, *who has been cutting a piece of bread at the sideboard, turns with a gasp.*]

MR. LAMB: Where's Mary? [*Calling.*] Mary!—Mary!

[*A dead silence answers him.*]

BECKY [*at last*]: Oh, Mr. Lamb—*don't!*

MR. LAMB: Where's Mary, I say? Why are you keeping her from me? Answer me, woman—where is my daughter?

BECKY: Miss Mary—Miss Mary's away.

MR. LAMB: Where is she? At her grandmother's? Well then, she's to come back—she's to come home. I need taking care of. [*Crying again.*] Yes—I need taking care of—and nobody troubles! [*Suddenly.*] Where's my son John?

BECKY [*resentfully*]: At a party.

MR. LAMB [*smiling*]: Good boy! My favourite—good boy, John!

BECKY [*with an edge to her tone*]: Mr. John doesn't neglect you, does 'e!

MR. LAMB [*sensing the criticism*]: Don't you argue! You go away—go and tell Mary I want her.

BECKY: She's not 'ere, I keep telling you, sir. She—she's at 'er grandma's.

MR. LAMB [*suddenly speaking with intelligence*]: She is not at her grandmother's. Her grandmother is dead, I remember. Where is she, then? There's no one else

she can go to. Where is she? [*Struggling to his feet.*] Where is she?

BECKY [*greatly troubled*]: Oh, sir—'ave you forgotten—*that?*

MR. LAMB: Answer me—where is my daughter Mary?

BECKY: Miss Mary, sir——

MR. LAMB: Yes? Yes?

BECKY: Miss Mary is—in a mad-house.

[MR. LAMB *sinks back into his chair again.*]

MR. LAMB: Ah yes. I keep forgetting. In a mad-house. I—I'm very lonely now.

[HE *sits blinking at the fire, while* BECKY *watches him with pitying impatience.*]

MR. LAMB [*back in the fog again*]: Where's Charles? Why doesn't he come? He knows I like my game of cribbage before I go to bed.

BECKY [*speaking very clearly as she tries to penetrate his dull wits*]: Mr. Lamb, leave Mr. Charles alone when 'e comes in. 'E wants all the rest 'e can get. 'E's not very strong, you know.

MR. LAMB: But a game of cribbage—is only a *game.*

BECKY: H'm, a game can be mighty 'ard work when you're tired as '*e* is these days.

MR. LAMB: And don't you think *I* know what it is to be tired? Why—why, when I worked for Mr. Salt, the barrister, I used to be on the go morning, noon, and night. I used to do all his work for him—*all* of it. I was his servant, his clerk, his dresser—nothing I didn't do for him. [*With a senile laugh.*] He—he'd give me some difficult paper to work on—and—and just because I was busy, he'd dress for dinner without my help—and what *do* you think? Why, he'd go out without his sword—a terrible thing in those days! I never forgave myself for that! But there, there, he was always forgetting something. I had to keep a strict eye on him, I can tell you. Always forgetting, he was. [*Laughs again.*] Why—I remember—one day—he was going to dine with a cousin of Miss Blandy—*the very day Miss Blandy was hanged.*

"Now, Mr. Salt, sir," I said, "talk about anything under the sun, sir, but *don't* talk about *rope—hanging*—or *murder*." And *then*, what did he do? Why, he'd hardly been sitting in his friend's parlour four minutes, when he upped and said: "It's been a gloomy day for the execution. I suppose she'll be hanged by now!" Dear, dear, dear—and after what I'd told him!

BECKY: Well, I never! You wouldn't 'ave thought 'e'd 'a done that, now, would you?

MR. LAMB [*sharply*]: Who are *you?*

BECKY [*taken back*]: Who? Me, sir? Why, surely you know *me*, Mr. Lamb!

MR. LAMB: No, I do *not* know you.

BECKY: Why, I'm Becky—servant 'ere since Miss Mary was took away.

MR. LAMB [*as though talking of someone else*]: Becky? Becky? Let me see now. Oh yes—*a most disagreeable woman.*

BECKY: Well, God knows where you'd a-been if I 'ad'nt come to look after you. [*Under her breath.*] Silly old fool!

[*Door slams off.* BECKY *runs to archway and speaks off and down.*]

BECKY: Well, Mr. Charles, this is a nice time o' night to come 'ome, I must say! Yere now, do 'ee shake that there snow off'n ye afore you comes tramping up my clean stairs.

[*Stamping and blowing from below.* BECKY *comes down stage again.*]

MR. LAMB [*eagerly*]: Charles, is it? H'm, and about time, too!

[CHARLES *appears in the archway, slapping his chest with his arms.*]

CHARLES: B'r'r! Heaven d'doesn't t'temper the wind to *this* shorn Lamb! [*He comes to the fire, where* BECKY *is in the act of picking up his slippers.*]

BECKY [*suddenly grasping his leg and almost throwing* CHARLES *off his balance*]: Lord's sake! Your gaiters are sopping wet. Off with'n, now!

CHARLES: P'please may I have my supper first? I'm so hungry!

BECKY [*pushing him forcibly into a chair down* R.]: Not till I've 'ad they there gaiters off. [*Seizing his right leg.*] My, you don't know 'ow to take care o' yourself more'n a babe unweaned!

CHARLES [*jerked almost out of his chair by her ministrations—ruefully*]: K'kind—k'kind Becky!

BECKY [*still busy unfastening his gaiters*]: H'm, if you don't look after yourself a bit more, I'll be dressing you in your shroud before you'm much older!

CHARLES [*grinning at her*]: Ap'p'plying at the undertaker's for a lodging for a single gentleman!

BECKY: It's wicked of you to talk like that. Up with t'other leg. [*She throws him half out of the chair.*]

CHARLES [*trying to keep his balance*]: B'Becky—you're t'too good! That's the trouble with you. B'Becky Toogood—that should be your name, my dear.

BECKY [*not sensing the irony*]: Oh, go along!

CHARLES [*still in his awkward position—grinning at her*]: I like people best, Becky, when they do good *by stealth.*

BECKY: And what do you mean by that?

CHARLES: *Not* when they do good—*by force!*

BECKY [*giving him a sharp look*]: Well, a more ungrateful family I never did see! Yere do I give up a nice 'appy situation with the Widow Goodman, just to come and look after you all—and this is the thanks I get for it. [CHARLES *is taking off his boots.*] 'Ow about your breeches?

CHARLES: Don't make me shy, B'Becky!

BECKY [*seizing his knee*]: Yere, let me feel 'en, to make sure.

CHARLES [*pushing her gently away*]: Unhand me, woman, or I'll perspire! [*Dons his slippers.*]

BECKY: Oh, there's no doing anything with you!

MR. LAMB: Tell this woman to be off, Charles. *I* can't get rid of her.

[CHARLES *rises and pats* BECKY *on the shoulder so that she shall not be hurt by his father's rudeness.*]

CHARLES: Well, I—I think you had better go to bed, Becky. It's getting late.

BECKY [*uncovering plate*]: Time enough for me to go to bed when you've 'ad your dinner. If I don't stand over you and see you eat it, you'll be letting that poor loony cheat you out of it!

CHARLES [*hastily*]: Hush, Becky, hush!

BECKY: Oh—*I* know him and his ways!

CHARLES: Well, I promise you I shall eat my dinner, Becky. I'm s'so hungry!

BECKY: And then, I suppose, *'e'll* keep you up 'alf the night playing cards! [*Jerking her head back at* MR. LAMB.]

CHARLES: Not to-night. I'm m'much too tired.

BECKY [*pushing him into chair behind table*]: Sit down, then, and put *this* inside your stomach.

CHARLES [*grinning up at her*]: Don't make any mistake, Becky. I'm not *your* little boy.

BECKY [*considering him*]: You *are* a funny family—the whole lot of you. [*Places dish-cover on sideboard.*]

CHARLES: Then, thank you, Becky, for being so kind to us. [*Begins to eat his dinner.*]

BECKY: Now, then, don't 'ee go golloping your food down. Just you eat it quietly now.

MR. LAMB: *Good* night. You need not come again. Mary will be home from her grandmother's to-morrow.

CHARLES [*in an undertone*]: You'd better go to bed, Becky. He's getting bothered.

BECKY: Oh, very well. Good night, Mr. Charles. Good night, Mr. Lamb. [*Goes to archway with boots and gaiters.*]

MR. LAMB: Don't keep on saying good night! And I never want to see your face again.

[*Exit* BECKY *through archway, with a pitying toss of her head.*]

MR. LAMB: Can't think why that woman is always sticking her nose in here!

BECKY [*reappearing in the archway*]: Oh, Mr. Charles—

I'll put that there cloak an' 'at o' yourn afore the kitchen fire. Do 'ee give a look afore you goes to bed, to see as they'm safe.

CHARLES: I won't forget.

BECKY: Well, good night again, Mr. Charles. Good night, Mr. Lamb.

MR. LAMB [*very mildly, feebly waving his hand*]: Good night, my love.

[*Exit* BECKY, *somewhat astonished by the reply.*]

MR. LAMB [*querulously*]: You leave me too much alone, Charles.

CHARLES: But didn't George Dyer come to sit with you?

MR. LAMB: George Dyer? Oh yes—he came. But I might just as well have been alone. You know—*I* think that man is mad, Charles.

CHARLES: Absent-minded, but not mad.

MR. LAMB: Oh—*quite* mad. You wouldn't think, now, that a man could be put off a game of cribbage, would you? Well, right in the very middle, he got up and walked off with the coal-scuttle.

CHARLES [*laughing*]: Whatever for?

MR. LAMB [*disgustedly*]: The fool thought it was his hat!

CHARLES: God bless George Dyer! That tale forgives a dreary day. [*His smile turns into a yawn.*] Oh Lord, I'm so sleepy!

MR. LAMB: Finish your dinner quickly, Charlie. I *would* like a game of cribbage.

CHARLES [*putting his hand in his pocket and drawing out a slim little book*]: Here's a book of Wordsworth's poems I bought for you, Dad. Wouldn't you like to read them instead? You were always very fond of p'poetry. [*Placing book on table.*]

MR. LAMB [*obstinately*]: No—I'd sooner have a game of cribbage. [*Eagerly.*] You're not eating your dinner, boy. Why not start now?

CHARLES: I'm alm-most too faint to eat. But I ask your leave to finish it.

MR. LAMB [*throwing himself back in his chair and speaking petulantly*]: Oh—very well! [*Then, wringing his hands*

and shaking his head in a childish fashion.] I often—yes—I often wish my old mother was alive!

CHARLES: That's a sentiment common to us all in moments of dis-distress, sir.

MR. LAMB [*his mind caught by the new topic*]: Ah yes—my poor mother! I remember, Charlie—I remember when I was quite a little boy—a very little boy—coming up from Lincoln to go into service. Dear me, how my mother cried at parting with me . . . yes—cried as though her heart would break! And oh, Charlie, London seemed such a lonely place—I used to lie awake and sob, I was so homesick! [*Almost gurgling with joy in remembrance.*] And then, Charlie—my first holiday—not for many a long year, of course—but oh, Charlie, my first holiday!—I went home to see my mother—and I—*I wore my smart new livery!* Mother fair blessed herself when she saw me, and oh, how I strutted before all those country bumpkins who'd never been to London!

[*During this the fork has slipped from* CHARLES's *hand, and his head has drooped lower and lower upon his breast. He is so tired that he has fallen asleep during the retelling of this familiar story.*]

MR. LAMB [*eagerly*]: I see you've finished your dinner, Charlie. Let's—let's get on with the game.

[CHARLES's *head droops yet lower, and seeing this* MR. LAMB *craftily removes his plate, knife and fork, carries them over to the fireplace and hides them under an arm-chair. This done, he takes from the mantelpiece cards and cribbage-board and places them ready on the table. He chuckles to himself as he seats himself* R. *of table and shuffles the cards. Then, pressing his fingers to his upper lip, he looks craftily at* CHARLES.]

MR. LAMB: Cut for deal, Charlie. Eh, Charlie! Wake up! You can't sleep all the evening. Cut for deal, boy—cut for deal. [*He prods* CHARLES *with an intentionally cruel forefinger.*]

CHARLES [*waking with a start*]: Eh? [*Looks about him wildly.*]

MR. LAMB : Cut for deal.

CHARLES [*vaguely*] : I th-ought I was eating my dinner.

MR. LAMB [*knowingly*] : O-oh! Why, you finished that long ago, and carried the plate into the kitchen. Don't you remember? Come, come, now, boy—cut for deal.

[CHARLES, *trying to stifle a yawn, cuts the cards.*]

MR. LAMB [*as he also cuts the cards*] : Ah-ha! My deal! [*He shuffles again eagerly.*] Cut!

[CHARLES *cuts again.* MR. LAMB *then deals five cards each.*]

MR. LAMB [*when this is done*] : Crib, Charles, crib! You're non-dealer.

[CHARLES *throws out his cards, followed by his father.*]

MR. LAMB : Cut for the start, boy. Dear, dear, dear—how slow you are!

[*They play.*]

CHARLES [*counting his cards and marking with the pegs*] : Fifteen—two. Fifteen—four. And one for his nob—five.

MR. LAMB [*chuckling as he counts his own cards*] : Fifteen—two. Fifteen—four. Fifteen—six. Ah-ha! Fifteen—eight. Pair of aces and sequence—five. I'll beat you, boy, I'll beat you! [*Rapidly pegging the board during this.*]

[*Enter* JOHN *through archway. He also is in black, but far more elegantly dressed than* CHARLES. *He throws his hat and cloak on a chair near the window.*]

JOHN : Good evening, Charles.

CHARLES : Good evening, John. Did you enjoy the dinner-party?

JOHN : Oh, yes. [*Complacently.*] Ah-ha!—yes—I think I may say I "kept the table in a roar". Good friends, good wine, good talk—what more can any man want?

[CHARLES's *head droops in another yawn.*]

MR. LAMB : Well—well—you tell us all about it, John, while Charles and I go on with our game.

JOHN [*firmly*] : No, Father. You must go to bed.

MR. LAMB [*aghast*]: Oh no, John, no! I've been alone all day, and now——

JOHN: Now you must do as I tell you.

MR. LAMB: But—but we've only just started our game, John.

JOHN: You've had quite enough for to-night. It's getting late. Besides, I want to talk to Charles. Now then, Father, do as you are told.

MR. LAMB [*reluctant but obedient*]: Well, of course, if you say I must—I——

JOHN: Of course I say you must—so off you go!

[MR. LAMB *rises slowly to his feet.*]

MR. LAMB: Oh! Oh well—good night, dear John. [*As he goes towards door* R.] Good night, Charlie.

CHARLES: G'good night, Father.

[*Exit* MR. LAMB.]

CHARLES: Do you want to speak to me about anything s-pecial, John? Because I cannot promise you my whole attention—I'm s'so sleepy.

JOHN [*spreading himself in front of fire*]: Well, it's rare for me to see you of late.

CHARLES: Your office hours are easier than mine!

JOHN: Yes, perhaps. . . . I thought this would be a good opportunity for a talk over our difficulties.

CHARLES [*with a yawn*]: Y'yes, John?

JOHN: You know—you devote too much time to the old fellow. [*Nods in the direction of* MR. LAMB's *room.*]

CHARLES: A man must live according to his lights.

JOHN: But not according to *ancient lights*! Ha, ha, ha! [*Laughs boisterously at his own joke. Then, finding* CHARLES *does not respond, he adds seriously.*] By the way, when did you last see—yes—when did you last go to Islington?

CHARLES: On S-unday. I've been working late all the week.

JOHN: And how was—er—Mary?

CHARLES: I found her very c'comfortable. And the good lady of the house has taken to her amazingly. M'Mary says she longs to stay there, if—if we can manage it.

JOHN [*considering*]: Yes—m'm—I'm afraid that is not possible.

CHARLES [*quickly*]: Not p'possible! Not possible for M'Mary to stay there? What—what is to be done then?

JOHN [*flatly*]: Mary must go to Bedlam.

CHARLES [*as though unable to believe his ears*]: John! You—you don't mean that! You *can't!*

JOHN: Use your common sense, Charles. Of course I mean it.

CHARLES [*suddenly turning on him in a flaming rage*]: Mary shall *not* go to Bedlam! My God, John, you'd send your own sister to a hell like that? You shan't! You won't! I—I—I'd sooner see her in her coffin!

JOHN [*impatiently*]: Well, what else is there to be done? If we keep her at this private mad-house, it'll cost us fifty or sixty pounds a year at least. We can't afford it.

CHARLES: We *can* afford it! We *must* afford it!

JOHN: How? Your salary is seventy pounds a year and——

CHARLES: Father will have his legacy at Christmas—that's a hundred a year——

JOHN: And you already dispose of it as *you* please. Where's *my* say in the matter?

CHARLES: You'll have a right to say what you will when I come to you for money! Father is old—he wants very little—and how could *he* enjoy this money while Mary is enduring a living d'death from which he might save her?

JOHN: But there's no getting away from it—Mary is *mad*!

CHARLES: Place her in a public hospital with gibbering m'maniacs all about her, and you'll *drive* her mad!

JOHN [*with a sigh of exasperation*]: And what do you intend to do? Keep her at this place at Islington all her life?

CHARLES: No. When she is fit to be moved, I shall have her home again.

JOHN [*jumping*]: *Home again!* You—you don't know what you're talking about! Good God, man, you seem to forget that Mary killed her own mother!

[CHARLES *flinches.*]

[*Coming to table and sitting* R.] Face the facts, Charles, face the facts! If we didn't live in an age of enlightenment, think—just think what would have happened to her! If she'd stolen a sheep or franked a letter without licence, she'd have been hanged, sure enough. But for this—a far more serious offence—she has been treated with unexampled clemency! And why? Because the verdict was—insanity. *Insanity!*

[CHARLES *turns away.*]

And yet, *you*—you are fool enough to want to bring her home again! My God! Have you thought of the risk we should run?

CHARLES [*quietly*]: I don't think we should run any risk, John.

JOHN: How can you tell—after what's happened?

CHARLES: If there *is* any risk, I shall face it gladly. I have given my s-olemn word that I would take Mary under my care—for life.

[JOHN'S *jaw drops.*]

JOHN: What, man, mortgage your future? You must be mad!

CHARLES [*with a twisted smile*]: N'near enough.

JOHN: I—I can't think you realize the heavy responsibilities you've taken upon yourself. I'm more than ten years older than you—I see things more clearly than you do—I——

CHARLES: I think I am wise beyond my years, John. You need not fear I shall fail.

JOHN: But—but—man alive! The time will come when you will want to marry. Don't you see—marriage will be an utter impossibility with Mary on your hands!

CHARLES: I—I don't think I shall ever marry, John.

JOHN: Oh, nonsense! That's pledging yourself to too great a sacrifice. The flesh is weak, my boy, but it often conquers the spirit.

CHARLES: Do *you* intend to m'marry, John?

JOHN: Of course I shall—when I find a woman worthy of my choice. And you'll do the same—no less—when the time comes.

CHARLES [*thoughtfully*]: I wonder!

JOHN [*a sudden light dawning upon him*]: Ah! I know who is at the bottom of all this nonsense about Mary! It's Sam Coleridge.

CHARLES: Well, as he's been my best friend since we were B'Bluecoat boys, I've naturally told him——

JOHN [*angrily*]: And Coleridge, with his damn sentimentality, has, of course, encouraged this foolishness!

CHARLES: *He* doesn't regard it as foolishness. He thinks it's the only thing I can do.

JOHN: You don't intend to bring Mary back here, I take it?

CHARLES [*flinching*]: No. The s-ight of these rooms—no—that wouldn't be possible!

JOHN: Ah! Well, that makes it easier to say what is in my mind. I've been offered a fine suite of rooms in—yes—in the City. I have decided to take them.

[CHARLES *is held silent by astonishment.*]

CHARLES [*at last*]: You—you are going to leave us and—and l'live apart?

JOHN: Yes. Yes, I think so.

CHARLES: You—you want to break up the home, John?

JOHN: Yes, my health would be better for the change.

[CHARLES *thinks hard for a moment.*]

CHARLES [*after a pause, looking at his brother very hard*]: John—be honest with me. Are you going to—to leave us—like this—because of M'Mary?

JOHN [*uncomfortably*]: Well, I—I must confess that nothing would induce me to live under the same roof with her again.

CHARLES: I see. [*Rises and goes to fireplace, where he sits.*] Well—[*as though suddenly making up his mind*] in that case, I think I shall take rooms for father and myself at Pentonville. Then I shall be near enough to see Mary every day—that would make her a little happier.

JOHN: Live at Pentonville! And d'ye think father will consent to live in such an out-of-the-way place? *I* don't.

CHARLES: I—I must try to persuade him—somehow.

JOHN: And when Mary has quite recovered—what then? Do you seriously think it safe for her and father to live together?

CHARLES: That I—shall have to consider.

JOHN: It would be most unwise, to my way of thinking.

CHARLES [*faltering a little*]: I can only t'take one step at a time, John.

JOHN [*cheerfully, rising*]: Well, I'm for bed. You'd better come, too, Charles.

CHARLES: Not yet. This fire is too good to leave for an icy bedroom.

JOHN: You'll get chilblains—toasting your feet.

CHARLES [*pushing back his chair a little*]: You never speak but with c'common sense——[*He breaks off, finding his foot has knocked against his hidden plate.*] Why—what's this? My dinner! And all unfinished! [*With a grin in the direction of his father's door.*] The artful old s'scoundrel! No wonder I'm hungry.

JOHN: You should be firm with him, otherwise he'll always be playing these silly tricks.

[CHARLES *carries plate, knife and fork to his place at the table and sits.*]

JOHN: But surely, Charles, you're not going to eat that *now!* It's cold and looks most unappetizing.

CHARLES: You speak like a full man—I eat like an—an empty one! [*Begins to eat ravenously.*]

JOHN: Oh well—good night to you!

CHARLES: Good night, John. I shall follow you soon.

JOHN [*pausing with the door-knob in his hand*]: Do what

you may, Charles, you'll never persuade father to live at Pentonville!

[JOHN *goes off* L., *and careless whether his father is asleep or no, closes the door loudly.*

CHARLES, *busy with his dinner, pauses with his fork half-way to his mouth at* JOHN'S *final words. He is so occupied with his thoughts that he does not realize that the closing of the door has been the signal for the return of* MR. LAMB, *who now slips cautiously into the room. He is without his coat and is wearing a tasselled nightcap. He creeps up behind his son.*]

MR. LAMB [*like a conspirator*]: Eh, Charlie!

[CHARLES *gives a start of surprise.*]

MR. LAMB [*seating himself at the table*]: Let's get on with the game, boy—yes—let's get on with the game. It's *my* crib.

CHARLES [*laying down his knife and fork*]: I beg you to excuse me, Father. I'm d'dead tired.

MR. LAMB [*petulantly*]: Oh, if you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all!

CHARLES [*with a laugh, and a significant glance at* JOHN'S *door as he pushes back his plate*]: A very apt reply, Dad! [*Watching his father intently.*] Wouldn't—wouldn't it be nice to have Mary home again, Father?

MR. LAMB: Yes—it's lonely without her. I'm very lonely these days. And she *would* look after me.

CHARLES: Of course she would. [*With an effect of carelessness.*] By the way, how—how would you like to live at Pentonville?

MR. LAMB [*looking up sharply*]: Oh! At Pentonville?

CHARLES [*playing with the cards to hide his anxiety*]: Yes.

MR. LAMB: Do—yes—do any *good cribbage players* live at Pentonville?

CHARLES [*with a triumphant laugh*]: Why—it's their natural home, I believe!

[*Upon* MR. LAMB'S *joyous chuckle and* CHARLES'S *triumph* THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

END OF ACT I

The Scene is laid in Professor Godwin's house in Somers Town on an evening in February 1800.

It is one of those "Evenings" when, at some one or other of the different houses, the Lambs and their friends met for whist and talk.

The drawing-room is large and panelled, and at back opens into a smaller room through two doorless archways, R. *and* L. *Against the wall between these archways stands a spinet and a stool, with a small chair to* R. *In the inner room, to the spectator's* L., *is a sofa, on which is lying an embroidery-frame. Off* L., *but out of sight, are the hall and front-door. In the Right opening is a long table, covered with a cloth, and upon it are a half-consumed joint of roast beef, bread, plates, knives and forks, a jug of beer, wine, and many mugs and glasses. Through the inner room to* R. *is the way to the kitchen.*

In the centre of the Right wall is a fireplace; on the mantelpiece are "churchwardens," a jar of tobacco, and pipe-lighters. Above the fireplace is a small table with a decanter and glasses. Below fireplace is a large throne-like chair, obviously intended for the "lion" of the evening, and beside it is a low stool. Slightly above the fireplace, too, is a smaller arm-chair. Other chairs in various parts of the room.

In the middle of the L. *wall double doors give on to another room.*

Down L.C. *is a card-table with a pack of cards.*

Before CURTAIN RISES MRS. GODWIN *is heard playing "There is a Lady".*

MRS. GODWIN, *Godwin's second wife and herself a widow, is thirty-five, brisk and buxom. Her good looks are marred by bad temper and envy, and her manners by vulgarity. She is wearing a dress as strident as her personality.*

GODWIN *is about forty-four, with a large head, a thick body, and thick, short legs. He is inclined to baldness, bushy as to eyebrow, and has a very large, blunt nose. His*

fine grey eyes are somewhat shrouded by spectacles. His voice is weak and thin.

The CURTAIN RISES *as the music is concluding, to discover* MARY *sitting to* R. *of* MRS. GODWIN *at the spinet, with* CHARLES *standing beside her, and* GODWIN *on his wife's left.*

[MARY *is a very different creature from the distraught, harassed woman of the first Scene. Her manners are gentle, her voice is low. She smiles often, but rarely laughs. Her love for* CHARLES *amounts to a passion; her eyes follow him about, even when she is talking to others. She is wearing a dress of grey silk with a white kerchief.*]

GODWIN [*when music ends*]: Bravo, my love! An elegant execution.

MARY: Thank you, Mrs. Godwin.

GODWIN: Now then, Charles, what tune was that?

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Some sort of hymn t'tune, wasn't it, Godwin?

GODWIN [*chaffing him*]: What a wonderful ear for music you have, to be sure!

CHARLES: But wasn't it a hymn tune? It sounded most s-olemnly like it.

MRS. GODWIN: Not at all.

[MRS. GODWIN *plays the tune again, and* GODWIN *sings:*]

GODWIN: "*There is a Lady sweet and kind,*
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her till I die!"

CHARLES [*with sudden harshness at the conclusion*]: A charming poem. 'Tis a pity it was ever mutilated by music!

GODWIN [*teasing him*]: But why should it upset you so? Oh-ho! I believe you've lost your heart to some passer-by at Pentonville! Ah, these pretty country girls!

CHARLES [*still harshly*]: I have lost my heart to no one.

GODWIN [*still teasing him*]: There's too much heat in your denial, Charles.

MARY: I'm not sure but what you are right, Professor. There is a little Quaker girl——

[CHARLES *turns sharply away and walks over to the fireplace. Seeing this,* MARY *adds hastily:*]

MARY: But we know none of our neighbours.

GODWIN [*following* CHARLES]: A little Quaker, eh, Charles? Be careful—they are generally a snare and a delusion.

[MRS. GODWIN *leads* MARY *into the inner room, where they seat themselves on the sofa and discuss the embroidery.*]

CHARLES [*still harshly*]: I know no Quaker girl at Pentonville.

GODWIN: Oh, come, Charles, I shall think there is more in this than I thought for, if you're so serious about it.

CHARLES [*more quietly*]: There is nothing in it, believe me.

GODWIN [*brushing this aside*]: Oh, my dear Charles! By the way, do you know a poem of yours I'd like to see set to music?

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Any fate is good enough for my poems—so why not music? What is this particular one?

GODWIN: "The Old Familiar Faces."

[CHARLES'S *smile dies out.*]

CHARLES: Ah!

GODWIN: There's no occasion for modesty. It is a very fine poem, Charles.

CHARLES: Godwin—don't—please don't m'mention it before Mary.

GODWIN: Why not?

CHARLES: I wrote it after—after our tragedy.

GODWIN: Oh! Yes, I see. Mary knows it, of course?

CHARLES: Yes—and admires it. But all the same, it cannot help but awaken m'memories—terrible memories.—How do you think Mary is looking, Godwin?

GODWIN: Very well indeed. She has been much better of late, hasn't she?

CHARLES: Yes—a longer spell than any since father died. [*Under his breath.*] Oh God, if only it would last!

GODWIN: But why shouldn't it?

CHARLES [*shaking his head*]: It never does. 'Tis a very black shadow over our lives—the awful weeks that are cut clean out of her existence.

GODWIN: But at other times you are very happy together. You must remember that.

CHARLES: Oh, Mary is the most delightful companion in the world. But I rather think it would be better for her if we left Pentonville.

GODWIN: Well, you've been there four years. Time enough to tire of any place. I thought, though, it was so very—very convenient for—Mary?

CHARLES: Yes. When she has to—to go away, it is only a walk across the fields to the—asylum. But—well, in London, it is more easy to hide oneself. Nobody troubles about you.

GODWIN: And in a village like Pentonville, everybody knows everybody's business, is that it?

CHARLES: Yes. I suppose it is only natural for M'Mary to excite morbid curiosity. You'd have thought the thing would have been forgotten long ago. But no. And it distresses her terribly.—By the way, Godwin, I want to ask you a favour.

GODWIN: Anything in the world, my dear Charles!

CHARLES: This publishing business you and Mrs. Godwin are starting——[*hesitates*]

GODWIN [*encouragingly*]: Yes?

CHARLES: Godwin—could you—would you ask Mary to write for you?

GODWIN [*doubtfully*]: But can she do it? *Well?*

CHARLES: *I* think so.

GODWIN [*as before*]: This is something new, isn't it?

CHARLES: No. I've been encouraging her to write for some time.

GODWIN [*still doubtful*]: But—er—but isn't it rather a strain for her?

CHARLES: No. It makes her very happy. She says it gives her a purpose in life.

GODWIN [*smiling*]: Mary says her purpose in life is to take care of *you.*

CHARLES [*also smiling*]: I make her think so. So as to convince her that I can't get on without her, I give her as m'much trouble as possible. But she wants something more than that.

GODWIN: She is a wonderful friend to us all. You have made a great self-sacrifice for her, Charles. I think you can pride yourself that it has not been—*sterile.*

CHARLES [*eagerly*]: That is why you must ask M'Mary to write for you. To—to complete what I have tried to do. M'make her feel that her life is—worth while.

GODWIN [*suddenly moved, holding out his hand*]: God bless you, Charles! I'll see what can be done.

CHARLES [*shaking* GODWIN'S *hand*]: God bless *you,* Godwin. *Books for children.* Suggest it to her, will you?

GODWIN: I will, most certainly. It is a good idea. [*Going to table* R.] Let us have something to drink.

CHARLES: Er—Godwin!

GODWIN [*pouring out drink*]: Yes?

CHARLES: It would be more—more encouraging to M'Mary, if the idea came out of *your* head, not *mine.*

GODWIN [*bringing down drink*]: Just as you wish, my dear Charles. Well, let's drink to her success.

CHARLES [*taking glass*]: Thank you, Godwin. Here's——

[*As* CHARLES *raises his glass towards* MARY, *she quite unconsciously passes her hand over her brows as though brushing something away. The smile fades from* CHARLES'S *lips, and he suddenly turns and puts the glass on the mantelpiece.*]

GODWIN: Hallo, Charles! Not taking your wine? Why what's this? You've never failed yet as a drinker!

CHARLES [*with his back turned to* MARY]: Godwin—watch M'Mary for a moment.

GODWIN: Why?

CHARLES: What is she doing?

GODWIN: Smiling like her own sweet self.

[MARY *again brushes her hand across her brows.*]

Ah, a gesture of fatigue, perhaps——

CHARLES: *What* gesture?

GODWIN: As though brushing something away from her brows.

CHARLES: "Brushing the cobwebs away" she calls it.

GODWIN: Well?

CHARLES: When she does that I—I begin to watch her.

GODWIN: Oh, but surely you are over-anxious!

CHARLES: I cannot be *too* anxious, Godwin. [*Eagerly.*] Ask her now about writing for you. Give her something to think about that will take her out of herself.

GODWIN: I will at once. [*Going towards* L. *archway*] Mary! Come in here, will you? I have something to say to you.

[MARY *rises and enters.*]

Come and sit by the chimney-piece. [*He places her in arm-chair above fireplace, then he beckons to his wife.*] My love!

[MRS. GODWIN *enters and* GODWIN *goes and whispers to her.*]

MARY [*looking up at* CHARLES *as he stands in front of the fireplace*]: What is it, Charles? [*She unconsciously brushes her hand across her brows again.*]

CHARLES [*with assumed indifference*]: Oh, some b'bee in his bonnet, I've no doubt.

GODWIN: Mary, this publishing business we're starting. Has it ever occurred to you to write books?

MARY [*eagerly—out of herself*]: Oh, I should love—— [*More quietly.*] But what made you think that I *could?*

GODWIN: Well—well, you always write such charming letters that I've been wondering. It seems to me that you might write some delightful books for children.

MARY [*joyfully, holding out her hand to* CHARLES]: Oh, Charles!—could we do it together?

CHARLES [*patting her hand*]: Yes, I think so.—This is a most happy suggestion of yours, Godwin. M'Mary has been writing quite a deal of late. Of course I have to look after her grammar and *all* of the spelling, but although I should not praise her, I do declare, on my honour, that the ideas are—m'm'middling!

MRS. GODWIN [*tersely*]: What flattery!

GODWIN: Then you would like to do this work for us, Mary?

MARY [*with tremulous eagerness*]: With very great pleasure, sir. I—I will do my best to satisfy you.

GODWIN: That I'm sure you will. We will discuss it fully some other time. Sunday would be the best day for you, eh, Charles? Very well, then—we shall expect you both to dinner to-morrow week.

MARY: That will be delightful. Thank you very much, Professor.

GODWIN [*looking at his watch*]: Coleridge is late.

CHARLES: Oh, is S-am coming?

GODWIN: Yes, he said so.

MRS. GODWIN: He may have gone to fetch Mr. Wordsworth from his lodgings. [*To* MARY.] You know he is in London, of course?

MARY: No, this surprises me, for I had a letter from his sister two days ago, and she said nothing——

GODWIN: Some unexpected business, I believe, has brought him.

CHARLES: It will be very nice to see the old Lake poet again.

MRS. GODWIN: Yes. Indeed I approve of all my new husband's friends, except—George Dyer.

GODWIN: My love, you will have no sympathy over George Dyer. He is a friend of theirs, too.

MRS. GODWIN: H'm! Well, *I* think he is a very *strange* creature.

[*A knock at the front-door.* GODWIN *goes off through* L. *archway to front-door.*]

GODWIN [*as he goes*]: Now which angel is this, I wonder?

MRS. GODWIN [*tartly*]: 'Tis the *devil* if it is George Dyer!

MARY: Charles always calls him "a blessing in disguise".

CHARLES: 'Tis the quaintness of his disguise that m'makes him such a blessing. George is really a dove in sheep's clothing.

MRS. GODWIN: No good to anyone—least of all to himself.

MARY: He brings great love to his friendship, and Charles and I couldn't do without that.

[GODWIN *appears in* L. *archway, and pretending to be a major-domo, with a caper extends his hand and introduces the new guest.*]

GODWIN: Mr. George Dyer, ma'am.

[*Enter* GEORGE DYER. *He is a man of forty-five, and a very odd figure indeed. His gaunt and awkward form is emphasized by "knee-smalls" too short for him, tied at the knees by common string, while his rusty coat is just as much too large for him. His pockets bulge with books, which give a very lumpy outline to his figure. His rather long head is silvered over with short yet straggling hair. Round his neck is a piece of muslin in lieu of a stock, and this is yellow with age. His shoes, which are muddy, are also tied with string. But in spite of the shabbiness of neglect, he has a sweet look of kindliness, simple goodness, and serenity which is captivating in the extreme. That he was greatly loved by all his friends, letters and essays bear ample testimony. His absent-mindedness was the object of many a practical joke, the subject for many a story, while the hesitating manner in which he spoke—interspersing his sentences with the mild little monosyllabic sound, "abd-abd-abd", and ending with the incomplete phrase, "Well, sir, but however——" offered scope for many a kindly caricature.*

When DYER *enters he is all unconsciously still wearing his hat and cloak, and he is so short-sighted that he walks straight into* GODWIN'S *outstretched hand.*]

DYER [*in surprise, wondering where the blow has come from*]: Oh!

MRS. GODWIN [*curtsying*]: Good evening, Mr. Dyer.

DYER [*nervously, blinking all about him*]: Abd-abd-abd—good evening, ma'am.

CHARLES [*greeting him*]: Well, George, this is a most unexpected pleasure!

DYER: Good evening, Mr. Lamb. [*Still blinking round the room.*] Is Miss Mary with you? [*Bowing to a chair.*] Oh, good evening, Miss Mary.

MARY [*affectionately*]: Good evening, George.

GODWIN [*still capering*]: May I take your hat and cloak from you, sir?

DYER [*vaguely*]: Eh? [*Looking down at his cloak.*] Ah, yes—abd-abd-abd—most forgetful of me.

[GODWIN *takes his cloak from his shoulders, whereupon* DYER *walks away from him, still wearing his hat.*]

GODWIN [*as before*]: And your hat, sir?

DYER [*as vaguely as before*]: Oh, yes—my hat. Have I still got it on? Most impolite. [*Making no effort to remove it, he blinks continuously as he looks about him in his short-sighted way.*] Do you know—I can't see very well—abd-abd-abd—I have lost my spectacles. I really can't think what I have done with them. I have missed them for some days now. [*He removes his bent and battered hat, to disclose the spectacles perched on the top of his head.*]

CHARLES [*roaring with laughter*]: They s-uit you, worn thus—on the t'top of your head!

DYER [*removing them in surprise*]: Well, sir, but however——

[GODWIN *takes* DYER'S *hat, and with it and the cloak goes out through* L. *archway, joining in the general laugh as he does so.*

Another knock is heard.]

DYER: I—abd-abd-abd—I was afraid I should be very late. In fact, I didn't know at all whether to-day was yesterday. A trifle muddled—just a trifle muddled.

MRS. GODWIN [*disagreeably*]: I sometimes wonder you don't forget to breathe, Mr. Dyer.

DYER [*taking her seriously*]: Well—abd-abd-abd—I have never thought about it, ma'am.

CHARLES [*going to him and clapping him on the shoulders*]: Well, George, don't think of it while I'm alive. I couldn't do without you.

[*Re-enter* GODWIN, *introducing* CHARLES DUDLEY. DUDLEY, *who is about twenty-five, and tall, is very elegantly dressed. He is a young "buck", but pompous and without any sense of humour.*]

GODWIN [*to* MRS. GODWIN]: My love, this is Mr. Dudley. He is very anxious to know Mr. Wordsworth. My wife, sir.

MRS. GODWIN: Good evening, sir. [*Curtsies.*]

DUDLEY [*making a "leg"*]: Your servant, ma'am. The Professor has been kind enough to invite me to meet the poet this evening. [*Turning and seeing* DYER.] Ah, do I see before me the great Wordsworth?

CHARLES: No, sir—the great Dyer!

[*The others laugh, and* DUDLEY *is clearly annoyed.*]

DUDLEY [*turning to* CHARLES]: Ah, I know *you*, sir. You are Mr. Guy. One of the clerks at the East India House.

CHARLES: A guy by any other name would smell as sweet!

DUDLEY: I have suffered much from the clerks at the East India House. And from you, too, sir, no little.

GODWIN: Surely a case of mistaken identity!

[CHARLES, *behind* DUDLEY'S *back, puts his finger to his lips to caution "silence".*]

CHARLES: Oh, I'll answer for my sins, man! Or rather—for my jokes.

DUDLEY: I'll take a joke with the best——

CHARLES: Of course, sir—except against yourself. We all share the same failing.

MARY: My brother says I never see a joke at all, sir, so I can sympathize with your discomfiture.

[DUDLEY *raises his eyeglass and looks at her.*]

CHARLES [*hastily, before anyone else can do it*]: My sister, sir.

[DUDLEY *bows to* MARY'S *curtsy.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*as she leads* MARY *and* DUDLEY *up to table in inner room*]: A glass of porter, Mary? Mr. Dudley? Mr. Charles?

[*They all accept, but just as* CHARLES *is about to follow them* GODWIN *calls him back.*]

GODWIN: Charles! Why does he call you "Mr. Guy"?

CHARLES: Oh, it is just a joke at the office.

GODWIN: He's rather a pompous ass. I only met him this morning. I wish I hadn't invited him now. He clearly doesn't like *you*, Charles.

CHARLES: We played a jest against him, and he cannot forgive us. But let him go on thinking my name is "Guy", I beg of you, Godwin.

GODWIN: Why, Charles? Is this another jest?

CHARLES: A sad one, God knows. I don't want him to find out who M'Mary is. He is the sort of fellow who would show curiosity about her. Help me to keep him in ignorance, for to-night at least.

GODWIN: Let's keep him occupied with anything but talk, then, until Wordsworth comes. Otherwise he may get asking questions. [*Aloud.*] My love, do you think our guests would care for a game of whist?

MRS. GODWIN: Mary?

MARY: With pleasure, ma'am. Unless one of the gentlemen——?

[DYER *ambles over to card-table.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*decidedly*]: Not at all.

[DYER *sits* L. *of card-table.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*to* DUDLEY]: Would you care to play, sir?

DUDLEY: I should prefer to talk to the Professor, if I may.

GODWIN: By all means, sir.

MRS. GODWIN [*tartly*]: There is no question whether Mr. Dyer would care to play!

DYER [*vaguely*]: Yes, thank you, ma'am. I—abd-abd-abd—I think I have already accepted.

MRS. GODWIN [*under her breath, to* CHARLES]: That man always makes me lose my patience!

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Permit me to lead you to the card-table, ma'am.

[CHARLES *hands* MRS. GODWIN *to the card-table.*]

MRS. GODWIN: Come, Mary. Let us cut for partners.

[*They all cut, except* DYER.]

MRS. GODWIN: Come, come, Mr. Dyer. Do cut, if you're going to play.

DYER: Ah yes. [*Cuts.*]

CHARLES: You, M'Mary—and Mrs. Godwin. George and I. I'm afraid you are beaten already, ladies.

[*They seat themselves,* MARY *with her back to the audience,* MRS. GODWIN *at the top of the table,* CHARLES R. GODWIN *and* DUDLEY *are standing by the fire, talking.*]

MARY [*during this*]: Beaten? Not at all, Charles! It's a case of—"When Greek meets Greek——!"

CHARLES [*smiling at her*]: But when *you* meet Greek, M'Mary, you can't read it!

MRS. GODWIN [*as* MARY *is dealing*]: The pipes are on the chimneypiece, gentlemen. Smoke when it pleases you.

GODWIN: Thank you, my love.

[DUDLEY *and* GODWIN *light their pipes and pace the room during the following.*]

DUDLEY [*eager to continue his interrupted discussion with* GODWIN]: But, sir, am I to take it that you do not believe in *hell?*

GODWIN: Not at all, sir.

DUDLEY [*in shocked surprise*]: What! No fire and brimstone for the wicked?

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Oh, *I* think there will be a different hell for everybody.

DUDLEY [*indifferent to* CHARLES's *opinion*]: Indeed, sir?

CHARLES: Now I can describe a *schoolmaster's* hell—'tis a heaven full of little boy cherubs, all arms and wings and no behinds.

GODWIN [*laughing, putting his hand to his back*]: Did you suffer much, Charles?

CHARLES [*with mock solemnity*]: No little, in my day, Godwin.

MRS. GODWIN: I rather expected Miss Pate this evening. [*To* CHARLES.] You know Miss Pate?

CHARLES: Any relation to *Dr. Head?*

MRS. GODWIN [*who cannot see a joke*]: Not that I know of. *Do* you know Miss Pate?

CHARLES: M'Miss Pate I hate.

MARY: But, Charles, you do not know the lady!

CHARLES [*grinning at her*]: If M'Mrs. Godwin had said, "D'ye know Miss Dove?" I'd have answered, "Miss Dove I love"—or "M'Miss Pike I like."

MRS. GODWIN: Oh—then you do *not* know Miss Pate?

CHARLES [*gaily*]: No, ma'am—but damn her at a venture!

MRS. GODWIN: Well—I asked because Miss Pate is a literary lady.

CHARLES [*as though he were trying, very solemnly, to remember*]: Miss Pate—has she not written a novel called "The Heir Restored"?

MRS. GODWIN [*not realizing the pun*]: Not that I know of.

DUDLEY [*who has had half an ear turned to the conversation—to* GODWIN]: Your wife, sir, treats the gentleman's bad puns with great good-humour. They would madden *me*, I must confess.

[CHARLES *looks round at him with a mischievous smile.*]

MRS. GODWIN: We are waiting for you to play, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES: Madam, I ask your pardon. My wits are addled by your d'delightful conversation.

MRS. GODWIN: Yes. I always *do* think a card game should be enlivened by a little talk.

DYER [*vaguely*]: Why, ma'am? [*Peering absent-mindedly at* MARY'S "*hand*".] Er—abd-abd-abd—what are trumps?

MARY [*in protest, screening her cards*]: George!

CHARLES [*teasing him*]: If *dirt* were trumps, George, what a hand you'd hold!

DYER [*looking at his free hand in surprise*]: Oh dear, are my hands dirty? [*In confusion.*] Well, sir, but however——

CHARLES: Well, sir, but however—all is not dirt that looks it. There's comfort in that, George.

[GODWIN, *laughing, is caught off his guard when* DUDLEY *says:*]

DUDLEY: Miss Guy has an interesting face.

GODWIN: Who?

DUDLEY: Miss Guy.

GODWIN [*hastily*]: Oh—Mary? Yes, she is a delightful person.

DUDLEY: Is she a writer?

GODWIN: I am hoping to make her one. Her brother writes, of course.

DUDLEY: Oh, does he? I did not know that. What has he written?

[CHARLES, *as a signal to* GODWIN, *drops a card, and while he is scrambling for it makes a sign of caution.*]

GODWIN [*rather clumsily*]: Oh—ah—nothing yet of any importance.

MRS. GODWIN: Just fancy! Our next-door neighbour has had her *tenth* child. Such improvidence! We hear nothing but those screaming brats from morn till eve. How do *you* like babies, Mr. Charles?

CHARLES: B'boiled, ma'am.

MRS. GODWIN [*laughing, then looking rather doubtful*]: That *is* a joke, I feel sure. This woman's husband is a *butcher.* But they have a fine baby—weighs nine pounds.

CHARLES: *With* or *without* the bone, ma'am?

[*Another knock, this time a very impatient one.* GODWIN *goes off through archway* L. *to open the door.*]

MARY [*after the knock*]: I could wager—and I should not lose—that that is Sam Coleridge. His knock is always so impatient.

MRS. GODWIN [*eagerly*]: We will go on with the game. I think we shall win, Mary, I think we shall win.

[*Their heads bend in a concentrated effort to finish the game. They are so intent that they do not notice the entrance of* COLERIDGE, *who comes down* C. *and stands watching them with amusement.*

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE *is at this time about twenty-eight, above middle height, and inclined to plumpness. His hair is black and glossy, worn long, curling over his collar. His mouth is gross and voluptuous, and always a little open. His chin is round. There is a look of genius about the face, but the effect is utterly destroyed by its weakness, which is epitomized in the small feeble nose.*]

COLERIDGE: Good evening!

CHARLES [*throwing down his cards*]: Lo, the Infant Samuel!

MRS. GODWIN [*going to meet* COLERIDGE]: Good evening, Mr. Coleridge. [*Curtsying.*]

COLERIDGE [*bowing*]: Madam, I kiss your hand. [*Greeting* CHARLES *affectionately.*] Well, Charles!

CHARLES [*holding him off to scan his face*]: Still looking like an archangel just a little damaged! Bless you, Sam!

COLERIDGE [*patting him on the back*]: *Dear* Charles! [*Turning.*] Mary! 'Tis a small heaven to see *you!*

MARY [*greeting him*]: We are very happy to see *you*, Sam.

COLERIDGE: George Dyer—your servant.

DYER: Servant, Mr. Coleridge.

MRS. GODWIN: Is Mr. Wordsworth with you?

COLERIDGE: No, he is coming later.

MRS. GODWIN: Then who is out in the hall with the Professor?

COLERIDGE: Old John. I met him in the street, and he seemed anxious to come with me.

MRS. GODWIN: Mr. Dudley, I think you are not acquainted with Mr. Coleridge, another of our poets.

DUDLEY [*impressed*]: Sir, I am greatly honoured.

COLERIDGE: Servant, sir.

[*Re-enter* GODWIN *with* JOHN LAMB. JOHN *is looking very resplendent, with his watch-chains and varied-coloured waistcoats. He is more blustering than ever.*]

GODWIN: Here is an unexpected guest, my love.

MRS. GODWIN: Very happy to see you, sir.

JOHN: Your servant, ma'am.

CHARLES: What! Was there no fine dinner at the M'Mansion House, John?

JOHN: Not to my knowledge. [*Kissing* MARY.] Well, and how are you, Mary?

MARY: Good evening, John. It is more than two months since you came to see us.

CHARLES [*hastily*]: Mr. Dudley, this is my brother.

DUDLEY [*eagerly*]: Another poet?

JOHN: No, thank God!

MRS. GODWIN [*going to archway* R.]: Mary, will you come and help me make the gentlemen's tea?

MARY [*going*]: With pleasure, ma'am. I am always happy to be useful.

MRS. GODWIN [*fingering* MARY'S *dress*]: Dear me, your dress is of silk! And I always thought your brother was so *very* poor!

[*Exeunt* MARY *and* MRS. GODWIN *through archway* R.]

JOHN: Well, Godwin, there's a most indecent air of happiness about you!

GODWIN [*giggling*]: If a second marriage is so stimulating, what might not a third—and even a *fourth*—be?

CHARLES: Ins-anity!

JOHN [*laughing and turning to* DYER]: And how are *you* using the world, George?

DYER: Oh—abd-abd-abd——

JOHN [*hitting* DYER *on the back with too much gusto*]: Well, sir, but however——

CHARLES: Now, John, you must pay more respect to M'Mister Dyer in the future. Aren't you aware he's adopted an earl?

JOHN [*impressed*]: *An earl?*

DUDLEY [*also impressed, scanning* DYER *through his glass*]: *Really?*

CHARLES: Aye, and t'truly. George is as p'proud as a turkeycock, and can't talk of anything else. But he's always careful to add that he don't value earls in the least!

GODWIN: Oh, George, what a cheat!

CHARLES: Now, for my part, I've told *everybody* I had an earl come to see me. What I *don't* tell 'em is that I was out at the time, and M'Mary was doing the washing!

JOHN [*annoyed*]: But surely you could have managed better than *that!*

CHARLES: Oh, decidedly—if only George had let me know they were coming.

DUDLEY [*with veiled sarcasm*]: How very unfortunate!

CHARLES: Yes—for washing is not exactly a *round* game—at least, not with *earls*.

JOHN [*taking up a position in front of the fire as though he owns the house*]: Oh, this is just one of Charles's bad jokes!

GODWIN: Not at all, my dear John. I myself have met the earl.

DYER: Yes—abd-abd-abd—I am greatly honoured by his lordship's acquaintance.

[JOHN *looks him up and down as though surprised at the connection.*]

DYER: And—and strangely enough, sir, we—we seem to have much in common!

CHARLES: Oh yes—two eyes and a n'nose, two legs and ten toes! Which is indeed *most* strange, for you'd have thought the Almighty would have given the earl an *early* pattern.

JOHN [*sourly, as he straddles his legs*]: Oh—so it isn't another of your poor jests, Charles?

DUDLEY: *You* are one of your brother's victims, it would seem, sir.

JOHN [*smiling at* DUDLEY, *of whom he obviously approves*]: You sound as though you yourself have had cause for complaint, Mr. Dudley!

DUDLEY: On occasion I have, sir. Mr. Guy——

JOHN: Who?

CHARLES [*hastily*]: Mr. Dudley must forgive me. I did not realize a jest could rankle even longer than a blow.

[DUDLEY *turns loftily away.*]

CHARLES [*to* JOHN]: How do you think M'Mary's looking, John?

JOHN [*casually*]: Oh, well enough—yes—well enough. [*With vulgar suspicion, as he takes snuff.*] Not in need of money are you, Charles?

CHARLES: The b'butcher and the baker don't complain.

JOHN [*relieved*]: Good! Good! Richer than I am, I expect, if the truth were known. I'm nigh to bankruptcy.

COLERIDGE [*quietly*]: Yes—you must be!

JOHN [*annoyed*]: What's that? What's that? Why—*must be?*

COLERIDGE: I called in at Christie's with Wordsworth this morning. We heard you'd bought a picture—[*with quiet significance*] and the price you paid for it.

JOHN [*blustering the more because he is slightly uncomfortable*]: Ah yes—yes. You must come and see my new picture some time, Charles. I'll let you know when it is convenient. Are you interested in pictures, Mr. Dudley?

DUDLEY: Very much indeed, sir.

JOHN: I've a very fine collection—very fine. I should like to show them to you. [*They talk.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*calling, off*]: Willyum! Come and help me!

GODWIN [*making no movement*]: Instanter, my love.

[MRS. GODWIN *enters with tray, followed by* MARY, *who carries the teapot.*]

GODWIN: Our ministering angels, eh, gentlemen?

[GODWIN *capers an obeisance, but it is* CHARLES *who takes the tea-tray from* MRS. GODWIN.]

CHARLES: Where shall I put this, ma'am?

MRS. GODWIN: On the card-table, if you please.

MARY: Has Charles told you about his latest venture, John?

JOHN: God grant it is nothing I need blush for!

CHARLES: That depends upon your humour.

MARY [*looking straight at* JOHN]: At least it brings us in a little money for things beside mere bread and butter. There is that to be said for it.

JOHN [*impatiently*]: Well—what is it?

GODWIN: Charles has turned paragraph spinner.

CHARLES: Yes. The gossip of the day—p'preferably scandal—and above all, d'dress—at sixpence a joke.

JOHN [*dubiously*]: Oh, then it *is* true, is it? A man I know showed me the *Morning Post*—told me he'd heard the things were yours. [*Draws from his pocket a half sheet of newspaper, then puts up his eyeglass and reads:*] "There was a fine display of ankles yesterday,

in consequence of the high wind, and many a beau's breast was blown into a flame." That yours, Charles?

CHARLES [*in a meek voice*]: Yes, grandfather.

[DYER *accepts a cup of tea from* MARY, *but leaves her with the saucer, while taking the spoon.*]

JOHN [*turning newspaper*]: And this? "The only sign of modesty in the present dress of the ladies is the pink dye of their stockings, which makes their legs appear to blush for the absence of petticoats." Is *that* yours?

CHARLES: "My p'poverty and not my will consents" to write such jokes for sixpence.

JOHN: It's distinctly vulgar. Legs! My dear Charles! *Legs!*

DUDLEY: I agree with you, sir. More fit for the coffee-house than——

CHARLES [*good-humouredly*]: Than the consumption of ladies?

JOHN: Distinctly vulgar.

MRS. GODWIN [*as* GODWIN *takes the filled cups from her and hands them round*]: For myself—though I am no prude—I consider these flesh-coloured hose decidedly indecent.

CHARLES: As a harassed manufacturer of sixpenny jokes, ma'am, I m'must say that I bless these pink-coloured stockings—for without 'em I shouldn't have a leg to stand on!

JOHN [*flicking the paper*]: Well, I should have thought that you could do better than that!

CHARLES: Would you? T'Try it for once!

JOHN: Why, I—I make jokes every day of my life!

CHARLES: Worth sixpence?

JOHN [*bending and stretching his legs*]: More!

CHARLES: Ah, but then they c'come into your head of themselves. It's when the m'mountain has to go to Mahomet—when the head has to go out to the joke—that's the test. Why, it's a t'torture worthy of the Inquisition.

JOHN [*flicking the paper again with contempt as he folds it up*]: Well, *I* don't think these are *funny!*

CHARLES: Spare my ewe-lambs, John!

DYER [*suddenly*]: "Absence of petticoats!" [*Breaks into a whinnying laugh.*]

[*All stare at* DYER.]

COLERIDGE: George Dyer thinks they are funny!

DYER [*as he nervously buries his head in his teacup*]: Well, sir, but however——[*Scratches his head with his spoon.*]

COLERIDGE: The severest critic, John, is always the man who cannot do the thing himself.

JOHN: Thank you, Coleridge, but I generally know what I am talking about.

MRS. GODWIN: Your tea, Mr. John.

JOHN [*crossing and taking it from her*]: Thanks—ah—thanks. [*Boisterously.*] A cup of tea is very refreshing. [*Sits* R. *of table.*]

MRS. GODWIN: What has happened to the cards? Oh, I suppose my husband has taken them.

GODWIN [*up at table* R., *not hearing this*]: Would anyone like a slice off the sirloin?

ALL [*except* DYER]: No, thank you.—No, thank you, Godwin.

DYER [*waking up out of a reverie*]: Eh? What?

CHARLES: You are invited to *beef take*, George.

DYER [*almost brightly*]: Ah, thank you, thank you. Yes, I will, sir.

[DYER, *carrying his cup and spoon, ambles up to table* R., *where* GODWIN *is carving the beef.*]

GODWIN [*handing* DYER *a plate of beef, knife, fork, and bread*]: Here you are, George.

DYER: Excellent. Thank you, thank you.

[*Another knock at the door.*]

GODWIN [*going through inner room and off* L.]: I expect that is Wordsworth.

[CHARLES *and* COLERIDGE *are talking up stage* R. MARY *is seated* L. *of card-table.* DYER *brings his plate, knife, and fork in either hand, to below card-table, and balancing his plate on his knee proceeds to eat ravenously.* MRS. GODWIN *is sitting above table, with* JOHN *beside her.* DUDLEY *is by fireplace.*]

DYER [*as he comes down and sits*]: Mr. Wordsworth is a great poet—ah yes—a great poet!

JOHN [*to* MRS. GODWIN, *as* GODWIN *goes out*]: D'ye care for Wordsworth's poems, ma'am?

MRS. GODWIN: I like to read them, of course.

JOHN: But I'm sure you find 'em demn tiring when he insists on reciting them, eh?

MRS. GODWIN: A trifle wearying, I must confess, sir.

JOHN: Then I will undertake, ma'am, to keep the words out of his mouth this evening.

MRS. GODWIN [*with a disagreeable simper*]: Most agreeable of you, sir. Conversation is an art, but Mr. Wordsworth mistakes *his* Art for—*conversation!*

JOHN [*to* DUDLEY, *laughing*]: That's demn good, eh, sir?

DUDLEY [*shocked*]: But, surely—a great poet——

[GODWIN *capers into the doorway.*]

GODWIN: My love—here's a beggar at our door!

MRS. GODWIN: Kick him off the doorstep. [*Continuing her talk with* JOHN.]

GODWIN [*grinning*]: It's a rascally Lake poet, ma'am, begging—for a cup of tea.

[*Instantly there are cries of "Wordsworth!" and "Mr. Wordsworth!" and* GODWIN *stands aside for* WORDSWORTH *to enter.*

WORDSWORTH *is now about thirty, but he always looks very much older than his years. He is nearly six feet in height, but he has such a pronounced stoop, that with his narrow chest he conveys a physically mean appearance. His forehead is broad, but not remarkable for its height; a Roman nose, and fiery, though small eyes, while his cheeks are deeply furrowed. He is wearing a fustian coat with striped pantaloons. His voice is deep and guttural, with a strong tincture of the Northern burr which is native to him.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*as she goes to him*]: Why, Mr. Wordsworth! This is a great pleasure to us all! [*Curtsying.*]

WORDSWORTH: Your servant, ma'am. Ah, my dear Mary!

MARY [*rising*]: Very happy to see you, sir. [*Curtsying.*]

WORDSWORTH: Gentlemen, your servant!

[WORDSWORTH *gives them all a comprehensive bow, with the exception of* CHARLES, *with whom he shakes hands, giving him a friendly touch on the shoulder.*]

GODWIN: Wordsworth, allow me to introduce to you Mr. Dudley, who wishes to have the honour of your acquaintance.

DUDLEY [*gushing*]: Your very devoted, sir. I kiss your hands.

WORDSWORTH [*laconically*]: Eh? Oh! [*Nods to* DUDLEY.]

MRS. GODWIN: Tea, Mr. Wordsworth?

WORDSWORTH: Most grateful, ma'am. [*Taking his cup.*] The Professor wrote me that you want him to set up as a publisher.

MRS. GODWIN: Yes, that is my idea.

GODWIN: I've just been persuading Mary to write something for us.

JOHN [*to* MARY, *discouragingly*]: Oh—do you think you could?

CHARLES: Why, of course, John! M'Mary has already written one or two stories from Shakespeare that are most excellent, and I've promised that if she will do all the comedies, I will do the tragedies. [*Seats himself on stool down* R.]

JOHN [*scoffing*]: So you think you can rewrite Shakespeare's plays for him, eh?

MARY: No, John—not rewrite them. Translate them into—story form.

JOHN: Oh! And what'll ye call 'em?

CHARLES [*mischievous and unguarded*]: Why not "Lambs' Tales"? [*Glances anxiously at* DUDLEY.]

ALL [*with the exception of* DUDLEY]: Lambs' Tales?

DUDLEY: But why "Lambs' Tales"?

WORDSWORTH: Apt, Charles, very apt.

MRS. GODWIN: Smoke when it pleases you, gentlemen.

[*Murmurs of thanks, and during the following each of the men in turn fills and lights a "churchwarden", with the exception of* CHARLES, *who smokes his own rather short black clay pipe.*]

GODWIN: Well, I think the stories from Shakespeare will prove a most excellent notion. Don't you, gentlemen?

DUDLEY: For my own part, sir, I think it would be infinitely daring to tamper with the works of such a genius.

[WORDSWORTH *takes the throne-chair as though it is his by right. With his thoughtful, furrowed face that is older than his years, and* CHARLES, *with his look of quaintness, on the low stool beside him, they are very like Lear and his attendant fool. At* DUDLEY'S *remark,* WORDSWORTH *looks at him with disfavour.*]

WORDSWORTH: A genius—yes. Shakespeare was most certainly that. But are we not, perhaps, a little—er—overawed? Now I often think *I* could write like Shakespeare had I the mind.

CHARLES [*softly*]: Nothing is wanting then—but *the mind!*

[COLERIDGE, *whose jaw has dropped in astonishment at* WORDSWORTH'S *conceit, now bursts out laughing, the others joining in.*]

WORDSWORTH [*smiling down at* CHARLES]: Ah, Charles, the oil of our self-conceit is tempered by the vinegar of your irony.

CHARLES [*sadly*]: Alas! irony is the self-defence of failure.

COLERIDGE: Oh, come, you are not proved a failure *yet*, Charles. You will make your mark, I fancy, some day.

GODWIN: Why yes! Who knows? Perhaps Posterity will award you as many laurels as any of us!

CHARLES: Posterity? No. I shall write for—Antiquity. But I've never had any luck with anything I've put my name to.

WORDSWORTH [*clearing his throat*]: I've written a new poem, Charles, and I feel I'd like to dedicate it to *you.* [*Rising and drawing out his poem.*]

JOHN [*leaping in to stave off the recital*]: My brother should be most flattered, sir.—By the way, gentlemen, what is the most vigorous line you have ever read?

[WORDSWORTH, *somewhat disgruntled, puts his cup on the mantelpiece and taking a pipe, sits again in the throne-chair.*]

COLERIDGE: The most vigorous line?

JOHN: Yes. Vigorous and imaginative.

WORDSWORTH [*seizing the opportunity*]: *I* wrote such a line in——

JOHN [*hastily*]: *Read*, I said, sir, if you remember.

WORDSWORTH [*annoyed*]: Oh!

CHARLES: I can recall a line—literally b'brimful of vigour and im'magination.

WORDSWORTH [*hopefully*]: Ah! And what is it, Charles? What is it?

CHARLES: "One hundred pots of porter—one pound one and eightpence."

[*In the general laugh that follows,* DYER, *who has been nursing his empty plate during the foregoing, rises and is carrying it up to table* R., *thus putting himself under* JOHN'S *eye.*]

JOHN: Well, this is an evening for poets, it seems. [*Out to tease.*] What about *you*, George? Have you been writing any great works lately?

DYER [*confused*]: Of a very indifferent nature, sir. Very indifferent, I'm afraid. Well, sir, but however——

JOHN: Come along, man—let the company have a specimen.

CHARLES: George feels his poems should be kept for the s-tudy—isn't that so, George?

DYER: Well, yes—abd-abd-abd. My poems always seem to need a great many footnotes.

JOHN: Come along, George! Let us hear one. You can leave out the footnotes.

MRS. GODWIN: Yes, do, Mr. Dyer. We must all bear our burden of mutual entertainment, you know.

DYER: I—abd-abd-abd—I will try to oblige, ma'am. You must all listen with great attention or else you will miss the rhymes.

[*Still holding his plate and knife and fork,* DYER *pushes up his spectacles on to his forehead, and blinking without intermission, proceeds to recite the following masterpiece of his actual composition.*]

"My dame—you view a sailor brave—
Hastening far hence to plough the seas;
To quit for the rude—the rude——"

[*He searches in his left-hand pocket, as he does so unconsciously dropping in the knife and fork. He draws out a dirty scrap of paper, and pulling down his spectacles holds them focused upon it and reads vaguely, his plate tucked under his arm:*]

"My Peggy's eye is dew-drop bright."
I don't know whether that is part of the poem——

[*Searches in another pocket and brings out another scrap of paper, and at the same time some of the cards he has absent-mindedly pocketed fall to the ground.*]

MRS. GODWIN: What! Do you carry playing-cards in your pocket?

DYER [*not hearing this, reading as he picks up the cards*]: Ah yes——

"So quickly—dame—must I depart——
And—[*looking at paper as he stoops*] and keep my heart still tight and steady.
For, dame—you view a sailor brave—
Quick—he must plough—the ocean wave."

[*Examining cards and notes indiscriminately.*]

I—abd-abd-abd—I completed the poem, I know—with most extensive footnotes——

[WORDSWORTH'S *eye is fixed upon him, full of disdain and envy at his own lost opportunity. Seeing the disdainful look,* DYER'S *hand goes up to his untidy back hair, and he ends up weakly:*]

DYER: Well, sir, but however——[*He then puts on his plate the cards he has picked up from the floor.*]

JOHN [*brutally*]: "Well, sir, but however"—you were right. The poem is *most* indifferent.

MRS. GODWIN: Well, I'm sure the poem would be most diverting if we could have *understood* it.

DYER [*examining the cards on his plate with interest*]: It is not intended to be diverting, ma'am. I think I must explain that in the footnotes.

CHARLES [*kindly, going to* DYER, *who is still picking up more cards*]: Oh, George—I shall write your life, one of these days; but it will have to be *all* footnotes, for no one would believe it otherwise. [*Takes plate from* DYER *and carries it to table* R.]

DUDLEY: Perhaps, Professor Godwin, these ladies and gentlemen are wondering if I myself write a little?

MRS. GODWIN [*sharply*]: Not at all, sir.

GODWIN: We are, sir, above such pedantry.

CHARLES [*with riotous boyishness*]: Let a man be but himself, we will love him for his faults. If he poses for what he is not, to hell with him—in spite of his virtues!

DUDLEY [*pointedly*]: Some people seem to pride themselves on their faults, sir. A very empty-headed pride, it seems to *me*.

JOHN: You are right, sir. My brother talks too much, in spite of Nature's attempt to gag him with an impediment in his speech.

MARY [*angrily*]: John!

COLERIDGE [*glaring at* JOHN]: I'd sooner hear Charles's stammer than some *unfettered* tongues!

CHARLES: Why, John, my s-tutter should most certainly be regarded as a blessing. But for that, I should have been an actor. [*Swaggering up stage in imitation of a bad actor.*] "To be or not to be—that is the question!"

JOHN: Well, something has been spared us, anyway.

DUDLEY: I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth.

GODWIN: You did not tell me that, Mr. Dudley.

WORDSWORTH [*frowning at* DUDLEY]: With me, sir? Not that I remember.

DUDLEY: Don't you, sir? I am a Controller of Stamps.

[CHARLES *begins to chant in no very musical fashion, and to execute a little dance to the tune of "Three Blind Mice".*]

CHARLES: He says he's Controller of Stamps,
Oh, he says he's Controller of Stamps,
But he cannot control, he *cannot* control—
My little foot when it stamps!
[*Ending with a double stamp of his foot.*]
[*All but* DUDLEY *laugh.*]

GODWIN [*trying to control his mirth*]: My dear Charles!

JOHN: Be quiet, Charles. You must be drunk!

CHARLES: T'tea always flies to my head! [*Comes and sits below table, where* MARY *quietly admonishes him like a naughty schoolboy.*]

[DUDLEY, *leaning against the mantelpiece in too studied a fashion, proceeds to concentrate his whole attention on* WORDSWORTH.]

DUDLEY: Don't you think, sir, that Milton was a great genius?

[WORDSWORTH *looks at him in open-mouthed bewilderment.*]

WORDSWORTH [*trying to hide his annoyance while studying his poem*]: Milton, sir, was undoubtedly a poet of the—er—first order.

DUDLEY: Undoubtedly, I think, sir. I am glad you share my opinion. By the way, sir, I believe you have lately been in Paris. What do you think of Bonaparte?

[WORDSWORTH *looks wildly round for some release from this boring stranger.*]

DUDLEY: A most remarkable man, don't you think so, sir?

WORDSWORTH [*testily*]: Oh yes. Most remarkable. No doubt! But it is better to keep him at a distance.

DUDLEY: For my part, sir, I cannot help thinking that he is a supernatural being. His life has been so extraordinary, that I feel his death will be miraculous.

COLERIDGE [*scoffing*]: What! I suppose you think he'll be carried down to hell in a fiery chariot!

DUDLEY [*coldly*]: I think that *anything* might happen to him.

[CHARLES *snatches up a candle and goes to* DUDLEY.]

CHARLES [*solemnly*]: P'permit me, sir, to examine your bumps.

DUDLEY [*tensely, to* CHARLES]: Sir!

COLERIDGE [*laughing*]: Charles! Oh, Charles!

WORDSWORTH [*laughing*]: My dear Charles!

JOHN: What a clown you are, Charles!

CHARLES [*in all innocence*]: You must certainly have a most remarkable head, sir, to have such great thoughts. Do permit me to examine your bumps.

DUDLEY: I refuse to be made a figure of fun by *you*, Mr. Guy.

WORDSWORTH: Eh, why d'ye call him "Mr. Guy"?

CHARLES [*with a roar to distract attention, bursts again into song, dancing with funny little steps*]:

Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on!

[JOHN, *laughing loudly, but almost in spite of himself, snatches the candle from him, and* GODWIN *and* COLERIDGE, *seizing* CHARLES, *carry him off through doors* L., CHARLES *still shouting:*]

CHARLES: Allow me to see the gentleman's bumps! Just let me look at the gentleman's bumps!

JOHN [*at door, to* MARY, *who in her anxiety is about to follow him*]: No, Mary. Leave him alone.

[*The door* L. *is slammed to, and from behind it comes* CHARLES'S *excited voice, accompanied by his companions' laughter.*]

MRS. GODWIN [*holding her sides*]: Oh dear, oh dear! What a funny little man he is, to be sure!

DYER [*raising his spectacles and wiping his eyes*]: By God—abd-abd-abd—he is a joyous entertainment!

JOHN [*to* DUDLEY]: You must really excuse my brother, sir. He does not mean to be rude, but he is nervous and high-spirited, and applause and laughter, with—yes—a glass or two of wine—er—go quickly to his head.

WORDSWORTH [*to* DUDLEY]: Why do you call him "Mr. Guy", sir? That is not his name.

MARY [*coming over and sitting on the stool beside* WORDSWORTH]: I can explain that mistake, I think. One fifth of November, the other clerks dressed him up as a guy and carried him as far as St. Paul's. They've called him "Mr. Guy" ever since.

DUDLEY: But—but they introduced him—quite solemnly——

MARY: Yes—they would. They dearly love a jest to be taken seriously.

DUDLEY: And what is his real name, may I ask?

JOHN: He is my brother, sir.

DUDLEY: But I'm afraid, sir, I did not have your name either.

JOHN: Lamb, sir. John Lamb. My brother is Charles Lamb.

DUDLEY [*impressed*]: What! Charles Lamb? The devil!

JOHN [*grinning*]: I hope not, sir—though it *would* be an honour to have him in the family.

DUDLEY [*with a laugh*]: Undoubtedly! But Charles Lamb! Why, I've been wishful to meet him for many a day.

JOHN: Why, sir? My brother is not at all famous.

DUDLEY: I have taken the liberty of setting a poem of his to music. I trust he will not object. But 'tis a poem I very greatly admire.

MARY [*eagerly*]: Oh, we *must* tell Charles!

DUDLEY [*to* JOHN]: By the way, I have connections of mine living in the same street with you at Pentonville, Mr. Lamb. They are Quakers.

MARY: Quakers? There is a little Quaker girl who often passes our windows. I wonder if she is a relation of yours, Mr. Dudley?

DUDLEY [*with a secret smile*]: Quite possibly. [*To* JOHN.] Have *you* remarked her, sir?

JOHN: I—er—I do not live with my brother, sir. [*Goes to doors* L., *and calling as he opens them*:] Charles!

CHARLES [*off*]: Yes?

JOHN: Mr. Dudley has flattered you by setting a poem of yours to music. You must thank him for the compliment and apologize for your—yes—unseemly behaviour.

[CHARLES *comes laughing into the room, followed by* COLERIDGE *and* GODWIN.]

CHARLES: Set a poem of mine to m'music! Mr. Dudley, you have your revenge!

WORDSWORTH [*rising*]: And what is the poem, sir?

DUDLEY: It is entitled "The Old Familiar Faces."

[*Instantly the light dies out of* CHARLES's *face. He looks round him as though trapped.*]

MRS. GODWIN: I hope it has a pleasant tune to it, Mr. Dudley?

DUDLEY [*less pompous now that he feels more of a success, and taking his music from his pocket*]: I trust it is in keeping with the lines, ma'am.

MARY [*looking at* CHARLES, *her face quivering—under her breath*]: I—I can't bear it!

CHARLES [*facing them all*]: Oh n'no! No!

GODWIN: My love, I think that perhaps—er—some other time.

MRS. GODWIN [*ignoring the protests, and already beginning to play the music* DUDLEY *has placed before her*]: I'm sure you will be willing to oblige, Mr. Dudley!

DUDLEY: With pleasure, ma'am. If the author will permit me.

JOHN [*domineeringly*]: Of course, Charles!

[*The others join in their persuasion, with the exception of* MARY, *who sits with her head bowed. Seeing that the combined will is too strong for him,* CHARLES *goes to the throne-chair and seats himself beside* MARY. *The clown mask has fallen from his face and he sits there tragic and still. He and* MARY *are unconsciously left isolated by the rest, the others being centred about the spinet with their backs to* CHARLES *and* MARY.

There is a hush. CHARLES *takes one of* MARY's *hands in his. Then* DUDLEY *begins to sing:*]

DUDLEY:

"*Where are they gone, the Old Familiar Faces?*
I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyous schooldays—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

For some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed—
All, all are gone, the Old Familiar Faces!"

[*When the song is ended there are cries of approval from all save* CHARLES *and* MARY. GODWIN *hands round glasses of wine to those nearest the table.*]

JOHN: A very fine composition, eh, Charles?

[CHARLES, *with an anxious glance at* MARY, *whose head is bowed with the anguish of remembrance, rises to his feet and quickly snatches up the glass of wine he has left on the mantelpiece.*]

JOHN [*during this, seeing* CHARLES *does not answer*]: Come, Charles!—Surely you agree that it is a very fine piece of music?

CHARLES [*placing himself between* MARY *and the rest. Almost wildly*]: D'Damn fine, John—damn fine! But 'tis a pity the gentleman has wasted his talent on such an inferior work. [*Raising his glass.*] Ladies and Gentlemen, a t'toast! I give you a toast! Here's to our *own* familiar faces—God bless 'em!

[*Glad of the change from sentimentality, the others laugh and cry, "Hear, hear!"*]

GODWIN [*obviously hoping the awkward moment has passed*]: To our *own* familiar faces, God bless 'em!

COLERIDGE: And may they never grow any worse!

[*All drink, except* MARY, *whose head is still bowed.* CHARLES *bends and comforts her.*

DUDLEY *has suddenly become intensely interested in* MARY—*an interest obviously not unmixed with horrified curiosity.*]

DUDLEY [*to* MRS. GODWIN, *thinking that* CHARLES, *who is still bending over* MARY, *cannot hear him*]: Mrs. Godwin —that lady! *Is that Miss Mary Lamb who killed her mother?*

[CHARLES *instantly jumps in upon him and, pretending to be drunk, strives to intervene between* MARY *and* DUDLEY'S *avid stare through his quizzing-glass. He dashes his glass to the ground in an assumed frenzy, dancing in front of* DUDLEY *as he roars out:*]

CHARLES: Oh, he says he's Controller of Stamps,
Oh, he says he's Controller of Stamps,
But he cannot control, he cannot control
My little foot when it stamps! Bang! Bang!
[*Stamping with the words.*]

JOHN: You're drunk, Charles—you're drunk!

MARY [*rising*]: Mrs. Godwin—I—I think we must be going.

CHARLES [*dancing between her and* DUDLEY, *who is still staring*]: Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John——

MARY [*catching his arm*]: Charles dear—Charles!

CHARLES [*still trying to keep between her and* DUDLEY]: Went to bed with his breeches on!

MARY [*curtsying to* MRS. GODWIN]: Good evening, ma'am. Thank you. Thank you for—for a pleasant party.

CHARLES [*blundering against* DUDLEY]: My son John——!

MARY [*almost crying*]: Charles, dear! Good evening, gentlemen!

COLERIDGE: Oh, don't take him away, Mary!
GODWIN: No, don't go yet!
MRS. GODWIN: A little longer, surely!

MARY [*trying to restrain the dancing* CHARLES]: Thank you kindly, but we—we should both be better at home.

[DUDLEY, *not realizing* CHARLES's *intention, is still watching* MARY *intently, though* CHARLES, *with his pretended clownishness, still tries to screen her.*]

CHARLES [*yelling*]: G'good evening! Goo' n'night! Everybody—goo n'night! Went to bed with his breeches on!

[MARY *has by this time drawn* CHARLES *up to archway* L. *She now disappears from view. Open-mouthed, up stage,* DUDLEY *stands staring after* MARY, *and seeing this,* CHARLES *suddenly clenches his fist and shakes it furiously in his face.*]

CHARLES [*almost sobbing with rage*]: Damn you, sir! Damn you! *In your breeches and out of 'em!*

CURTAIN

END OF ACT II

ACT III

SCENE I

The Scene is the Lambs' Lodgings at 36, Chapel Street, Pentonville, the following morning.

In the back wall R. *is a door giving on to the street with two long flat-set windows* C. *and* L., *through which may be seen the houses opposite, gay in the winter sunshine.*

Up R. *is a door, and below it an inset nest of shelves filled with books.*

Up L. *is another door. Above door a hook on which hang Mary's bonnet and shawl. In the middle of this left wall is the fireplace, with the sofa above it. Below the fireplace stands the chest. The table is* C., *with chairs on either side. The furniture is that of Act I, but the note which is now predominant is—books. They seem to be everywhere, on chairs, table, shelves, and even on the mantelpiece—worn second-hand copies, with their labels still attached, bought by Charles at some personal sacrifice, which generally takes the form of much-needed clothes.*

The fire is burning brightly. The room has an air of cheerfulness. Some loose sheets of paper are lying on the floor as though pushed off the table by Charles's impatient hand.

When CURTAIN RISES, CHARLES *is writing a letter* R. *of table.*

After a moment, MARY *enters* R. *She looks off and down, closes the door, then opens it again sharply and again looks off and down.*

MARY [*sombrely, as she finally closes the door*]: Charles!
CHARLES [*raising his head quickly*]: Yes, my dear?
MARY [*coming down*]: We must leave this house!
CHARLES [*turning in his chair*]: Why, M'Mary?
MARY [*shaking with anger*]: That—that woman——!
CHARLES: Who?
MARY: The landlady.
CHARLES: What? Mrs. Bracebridge?

MARY: Yes. She eyes me very oddly. She doesn't like us, Charles.

CHARLES [*after a moment*]: I think it *would* be b'better if we went away from here. I've thought so for some time.

MARY: Yes. I'm beginning to hate this place—with people staring at me, gossiping about me behind my back. [*Wistfully.*] Where shall we go, Charlie?

CHARLES [*putting up his hand and imitating a finger-post*]: To London! [*Cocking his head at her.*] Eh, my love?

MARY [*eagerly*]: Oh, yes, Charles. [*Coming to his side above table, and regarding him intently.*] I—I haven't offended you in any way, have I?

CHARLES: What put such a thought into your head?

MARY: You seem queer with me this morning.

CHARLES: Q'q'queer?

MARY: Yes. Whenever I speak to you, it's—"Yes, my love" and "No, my dear"! I can't think you care for me any more.

CHARLES: That's a vile lie, you old cockatrice!

[MARY'S *face instantly becomes radiant.*]

MARY: There, that's better! I thought you must be angry with me, since you no longer call me loving names.

CHARLES: But isn't "dear M'Mary" loving enough for you?

MARY [*shaking her head*]: I prefer the ones you always use—"old cockatrice" and "square-faced pig." There's a heartiness about them, Charles, that is most stimulating. [*Puts her hand on his shoulder.*]

CHARLES: Out upon thee, blackamoor! D'desist! I'm writing a letter. Hence! Away, you f'frog-faced hyena!

[MARY, *with a loving pat on his head, quietly proceeds to tidy the room.* CHARLES *writes another word or two, then signs his name with a flourish and throws down his pen.*]

CHARLES: This is my letter to Godwin. [*Reads.*] "Dear Sir, I send this speedily to say that Mary is obliged to stay at home on S-unday to receive a female friend, from whom I am glad to escape."

MARY: Oh, Charles, how rude!

CHARLES: The truth *is* rude and must prevail. [*Continuing.*] "I write this because it may make *some* difference in your marketing, for if M'Mary comes, I calculate she would eat: Beef, two plates—fourpence——"

MARY: *Two* plates!

CHARLES: "B'batter pudding, one ditto—tuppence. Beer, one pint—tuppence. I *don't* drink!"

MARY: What a lie!

CHARLES: "Wine, three glasses—elevenpence."

[MARY's *jaw drops in horror at his fiction.*]

CHARLES: "Tea and supper at moderate calculation—n'ninepence. Total—two shillings and fourpence. So you are the gainer by M'Mary's absence."

MARY: Well, knowing me, Professor Godwin will not believe a word of it! Am I a glutton?

CHARLES: Yes, honey.

MARY: A drunkard?

CHARLES: Yes, jewel.

MARY: A guest who tarries for tea and supper when but asked for dinner?

CHARLES [*with playful venom*]: Yes, m'monster—and after that whine for a night's lodging! How p'people can ask you to their houses, I don't know, you monkey-faced m'mermaid!

[CHARLES *has risen during this and now walks over to the window, while* MARY, *with a happy smile, picks up his fallen papers. Looking out, his tone of playful venom suddenly changes to a gentler note.*]

CHARLES: M'Mary—come here a moment. Quick!

[MARY *hurries to the window.*]

L'look—here she comes!—S-tand back—don't let her see you.

MARY: But who, Charles? Who?

CHARLES [*pointing off* L.]: Coming this way! My white witch.

MARY: But that's the little Quaker girl who lives up the street!

CHARLES [*putting his arm about* MARY'S *shoulders*]: Oh, M'Mary, I wish we had her acquaintance!

[HESTER SAVORY, *clad in white, with a large "poke" bonnet, passes by on the other side of the street from* L. *She is about twenty-three—dark-haired, and with a small face which is made to seem smaller by reason of the great black eyes. As she passes the house, she looks across at the Lambs' window, and* CHARLES *instantly takes an involuntary step forward, resting his hand on the sill. Then, as she hesitates, he bows to her. This she gravely returns and goes on her way, clasping Bible and handkerchief in her hands.*]

CHARLES: Oh, M'Mary—isn't she a d'darling!

[*He watches* HESTER *out of sight, then comes slowly down to the table again. He stands for a moment deep in thought, his eyes wistful, his mouth a little twisted.*]

CHARLES [*half to himself*]: I wonder what her name is!

[*Then he suddenly turns and takes* MARY'S *hands.*]

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, M'Mary—wouldn't you like to have lots of little n'nephews and nieces? What games—what *fun* we'd have!

MARY: Oh yes, Charles, yes. I would be such a loving auntie to your children!

[CHARLES *suddenly drops her hands. Then, lest she should feel repulsed, he pats her cheek.*]

CHARLES: On s-econd thoughts, perhaps it would be b'better to acquire our little lambs—*ready-made.*

[*With a stifled sigh he turns away, takes up his letter, scans it through, and is folding it up when* GEORGE DYER *passes the window from* L. *Neither* CHARLES *nor* MARY *sees him*—MARY'S *hand is again to her head, but it seems more as if she would keep her mind from wandering away from her, than because she is in actual pain.*]

CHARLES [*seeing her gesture, touching his own head and smiling a little questioningly*]: How is M'Miss Pate?

MARY [*shaking her finger at him*]: You were very naughty last night, Charles.

CHARLES [*pushing out his lips and looking like a schoolboy hoping to coax leniency*]: I don't know how it is,

M'Mary, but if people show they don't like me—I—I'm always t'tempted to misbehave!

[*There comes a banging at the door.*]

MARY [*opening door*]: Now, now, George! Why don't you use the knocker?

DYER [*vaguely, as he enters*]: The knocker?

MARY: Yes, why don't you use it, instead of drubbing with your knuckles?

DYER [*tapping his forehead*]: N.B. Remember to use the knucker instead of drubbing with the knockles.

CHARLES: It is very pleasant to see you, George—and very kind of you to walk out to see us.

[CHARLES *takes* DYER's *hat and cloak from him, to disclose the fact that* DYER *is wearing his coat inside out.*]

DYER: I came to inquire after Miss——

[CHARLES *grimaces him to caution, while* MARY *picks up the last of the fallen papers.*]

DYER: No, that's not right. I came to bring Miss Mary a book.

[MARY, *having replaced the fallen papers on the table, suddenly sees* DYER's *coat, and exchanges smiling glances with* CHARLES.]

DYER [*trying to find his pocket, but without success*]: Abd-abd-abd—I—I know I *did* bring you a book, Miss Mary. But I—I can't think what I did with it.

CHARLES [*slyly*]: You must have put it in your *other* coat, George. The one with the *p'pockets.*

DYER: But—but this is my *only* coat, Mr. Lamb!

CHARLES [*ranting*]: Then—then you are a turn-coat, George Dyer. A low t'turn-coat, sir. And as such—not fit to enter my house!

[DYER *turns in miserable embarrassment to* MARY.]

DYER: Miss Lamb—Miss Mary—abd-abd-abd—I don't know what he means. I am no turn-coat, I do assure you.

CHARLES [*with a mischievous smile*]: You are no turn-coat, George? Then why do you t'turn your coat—*inside out?*

DYER [*examining his coat in mild surprise*]: I—I *thought* my coat looked cleaner this morning than it usually does. Well, sir, but however——

MARY: Let me help you change it.

[MARY *pulls* DYER *out of one sleeve, but when she is about to help him with the other, he suddenly moves away from her. He walks over to the sofa with his coat dangling.*]

DYER [*as he sits*]: If you will permit me, I will remove my right shoe. It cuts into the foot.

CHARLES: A sort of m'misunderstanding!

MARY [*seating herself beside him*]: I went to your rooms when you were out yesterday, George. I hoped you would have noticed an improvement, but you didn't say anything about it last night.

DYER [*uncomfortably*]: Oh—abd-abd-abd—was it *you*, Miss Mary? If—if I had known it was you, I—I shouldn't have been so angry.

MARY: Why—angry?

DYER: Was it you who sewed up the holes in my chair, Miss Mary?

MARY: Well, it needed it, Lord knows! I counted no less than one hundred holes!

DYER: But—but every one was a pocket for my books!

MARY: Oh! I thought that chair looked a funny shape when I'd finished it!

DYER: Yes—abd-abd-abd—I couldn't find my books until I'd cut open the holes again.

MARY [*rising and going to* CHARLES *with a rueful smile*]: Oh, dear—all my work for nothing!

[CHARLES *roars with laughter.*]

CHARLES: Ah, Mary, you don't understand the needs of this dusty angel of the b'bookstalls, that's clear!

[DYER *has by this time removed his shoe with some difficulty. He now rises, his coat still dangling by one sleeve, and solemnly places his shoe on the mantelpiece.*]

DYER [*with an air of being intensely practical*]: I always put my shoes on the mantelpiece. Otherwise I am so likely to go out without them.

CHARLES [*very gravely, pulling his leg*]: I have to congratulate you, George. I hear you are to be made a lord!

DYER [*startled*]: Oh, I hope not, Mr. Lamb! Indeed, indeed, I hope not! It would not suit me at all. Oh dear no, Mr. Lamb—I couldn't think of such a thing!

CHARLES: I knew it would embarrass you, George, so I have decided to sacrifice m'myself in your stead.

DYER [*bewildered*]: Indeed, Mr. Lamb, indeed? Well, sir, but however——

CHARLES: Yes. But the Government have kindly promised to break it gently.

DYER [*utterly at a loss*]: Gently, Mr. Lamb, gently? Oh, what are they going to do to you?

CHARLES: Well, to-day I am p'plain Mr. Charles Lamb. To-morrow, M'Monday, I shall be C. Lamb, Esq. Tuesday, Sir Charles Lamb. Wednesday, Baron Lamb. Thursday, Viscount Lamb. Friday, Earl Lamb. Saturday, Marquis Lamb. A rest for his lordship on the S-abbath. Monday, I rise Duke Lamb. Tuesday, King Lamb. Wednesday, Emperor Lamb. Thursday, P'Pope Innocent. And *then*——

DYER [*breathless with excitement*]: Oh, and then—and *then*—abd-abd-abd——?

CHARLES: And *then*—then I return to where I s-tarted from—a l'little Lamb of God!

MARY [*smiling and placidly shocked*]: Charles!

CHARLES [*shamelessly*]: No s-auce, Mary!

MARY: What is the book you have so kindly brought for me, George?

DYER: Ah yes, to be sure—abd-abd-abd—the book.

[*Then, like a dog trying to catch its own tail,* DYER *tries to catch at the farther pocket of his dangling coat.* CHARLES *quite solemnly follows him round in his gyrations, and* MARY *tries in vain to look reproving.*]

MARY: But what is the book called, George?

DYER [*coming to a standstill*]: Oh dear, dear, dear! I have forgotten, Miss Mary. My mind—my mind is so absent.

CHARLES [*smiling at him*]: For you to be absent from the b'body, George, means to be present with the Lord! M'marry come up, I couldn't love you half so well if you were otherwise. [*He gives* DYER *a loving pat on the shoulder.*]

[CHARLES's *attention is suddenly caught to the window, and he goes up and hastily hides behind the curtain in order to look out unobserved.*]

MARY [*during this*]: Come along, George—let me help you turn your coat.

CHARLES [*excitedly*]: M'Mary! Here she comes back again!

MARY [*busy with* DYER's *coat*]: Who, Charles?

CHARLES: The little Quaker. [*Peeping out from behind curtains, then speaking in a low voice throbbing with excitement.*] She's not p'passing! She—she's stopping at our door! M'Mary! She's coming *here!*

DYER [*nervously*]: If—if it is a lady—I—I really must go. [*Getting farther and farther down stage until he is below the fireplace.*] Great deal of work—great deal of work to do. Well, sir, but however——

[*A timid knock comes at the door.* CHARLES *looks nervously at* MARY, *then hurries and throws open the door, to disclose* HESTER SAVORY *standing on the doorstep. She is carrying a small bunch of spring flowers. They hold the situation for a moment,* CHARLES *too full of admiration and* HESTER *too shy for speech. Then* MARY, *who has now managed to get* DYER *to look more seemly, comes forward.*]

MARY [*curtsying*]: Good morning.

HESTER [*shyly*]: Good morning.

MARY: Will you not step inside?

[HESTER *enters and comes down stage.* CHARLES *closes the door, following her with his eyes.*]

HESTER: Thou must please forgive me if I intrude.

CHARLES: Int-trude! Oh, you give us such great p'pleasure!

[HESTER *smiles gravely round at him.*]

HESTER: Rightly, I came to see Miss Lamb, sir.

CHARLES: Th-ank you for *that.*

HESTER: They tell me, sir, that since thou art away in London all the day, Miss Lamb is left much alone, and—[*hesitates, finding it difficult to refer to* MARY'S *illnesses*] and sometimes in need of—of a friend. I would be that friend, Miss Lamb, if thou wouldst let me.

MARY [*going to her*]: Thank you, my dear. [HESTER *hands her the posy.*] Thank you for such a kindly thought. I have no friends here. [*Her face twitches a little.*] People—people mistrust me in this neighbourhood too much to seek me out. I am most grateful to you for coming.

HESTER: Thou wilt forgive me, then, for making the first advances?

MARY: I could have made none towards *you.* But—since you know my name, will you please to tell me yours?

HESTER: Hester Savory, ma'am.

[*They curtsy.*]

MARY [*putting her hand on* CHARLES'S *shoulder*]: This, Miss Savory, is my brother Charles.

[CHARLES *bows and* HESTER *curtsies again.*]

[*Putting* HESTER'S *posy on the table.*] And this is Mr. Dyer.

DYER [*in a fine state of terror, blinking hard*]: Abd-abd-abd—good morning, ma'am. You will pardon me—abd-abd-abd—but I must be going.

HESTER [*gravely*]: I hope I do not drive thee from thy friends, sir?

DYER: Oh no, indeed, ma'am—oh no, indeed. Well, sir, but however—[*Grabbing* MARY'S *hand.*] Good-bye, Miss Mary. Good-bye, Mr. Lamb. [*Makes a rush for the door, grabbing his hat and cloak.*] Ah yes, good morning—abd-abd-abd——!

MARY: My book, George!

DYER [*having completely forgotten all about it*]: Eh? Oh, yes. I won't forget to return it. I won't forget to return it.

[DYER *rushes up to door, still minus his shoe, and having with difficulty found the handle, goes limping hurriedly out, saying:*]

Good morning, good morning, good morning——!

[*Exit* DYER, *flying down the street past the windows.*]

HESTER [*with a mischievous smile*]: I trust I did not affright the gentleman?

MARY: I think he is shy with ladies, but he is kind-hearted to the core. Will you sit, Miss Savory?

[HESTER *sits* R. *of table*, MARY *on the sofa.* CHARLES *stands between them, leaning over the back of a chair and watching* HESTER *with admiring glances.*]

MARY: You live in our street, I think, Miss Savory?

HESTER: Yes, the last house, ma'am.

CHARLES: Yours is the end door. That is why I call you—"The Witch of End-Door!"

[HESTER *smiles, then modestly drops her eyes.*]

Ah, but you must forgive a pun that savours of familiarity, when it indicates n'nothing but our loneliness. We are sometimes forced to amuse ourselves by finding n'nicknames—and so very occasionally, pet-names—for those who pass the windows.

HESTER [*gravely*]: I should like to think that *mine* was a pet-name, Mr. Lamb, if it betokened friendliness.

CHARLES: Yours is the only friendly face that looks across at our house. You see, we have lived in London all our lives till now—and the absence of fellow-gossips s-ometimes strikes us hard.

HESTER [*unthinkingly*]: And where in London did you both live?

CHARLES [*hurriedly*]: In the Temple, for the most part.

[MARY'S *hand has gone to her mouth, which has begun to twitch a little.*]

CHARLES [*with an anxious glance at* MARY, *talking volubly in order to give her time to recover her poise*]: London is the place, Miss Savory. Give me London, and

you m'may keep the loveliest scenery in the world! Oh, the streets—the markets—the theatres and the churches—the shops sparkling with p'pretty faces! The neat little milliners—the ladies bargaining, the apprentices lying to them about their wares! The lamps lit at night—the rattling of coaches over the cobbles! The drowsy cry of the watchman through the dark, with the bucks reeling home drunk from the taverns and coffee-houses! Oh, give me London of the m'many sins, rather than the flat quiet of the country! Eh, M'Mary—we're Cockney-hearted, eh, my love? [*Putting his arm about her.*]

MARY [*smiling a little tremulously up at him*]: I'm afraid so, Charles—and never to be converted.

HESTER: My parents, being strict Quakers, sir, would think ill of thy choice.

CHARLES: And *you*, Miss Savory?

HESTER: I? I fear I conform to their views but lamely. I am a woeful backslider. But there, I know no more of London than what I see from the window of the stage-coach—or passing quickly through the streets to a Meeting House. And—oh, I should not say it!—but it draws my fancy. [*Dropping her eyes and demurely folding her hands.*] Alas! they say the Devil's finest weapon is curiosity.

CHARLES [*striving to hide a loving smile*]: That is m'most true!

[HESTER *rises, and* MARY, *pulling herself together, rises too.*]

HESTER: Oh, I am bold to speak so freely, but [*a little wistfully*] it is so rare that I am with folk who do not think it a sin in me that I should speak my mind.

CHARLES: One should always speak one's mind, I think—unless it is a kindness *not* to. [*Voicing a sudden qualm.*] But, perhaps—if they knew us—your parents would be averse to your making our acquaintance, Miss Savory?

HESTER: I shall tell them that I have called, friend. And I—[*she smiles*] I do not think they will be angry. Not—not if they had seen thee playing with the children in the street, as *I* did. [*Turning to* MARY.] If thou needst a service any time, Miss Lamb, pray send for me. Good works have but little zest, I find, unless I do them for a friend.

MARY [*going to her*]: I am indeed grateful to you.

[*There is a slight pause, and then* HESTER, *whose eyes are on* MARY'S *tortured face, suddenly bends and kisses her hand.*]

MARY [*deeply touched*]: Oh, child, God bless you!

HESTER: And thee, Miss Lamb.

[HESTER *turns and goes to the door, which* CHARLES *opens for her.* MARY *is still standing down stage, looking a little wonderingly at the hand that* HESTER *has kissed.*]

HESTER [*curtsying to* CHARLES]: Good day to thee, friend.

CHARLES: Good day, Miss Savory. It is a *very* good day, since *you* have come to visit us.

[HESTER *goes off along the street to* R., *and* CHARLES *stands at the open door watching her.*]

CHARLES [*his joy at* HESTER'S *coming bubbling over*]: Oh, M'Mary, what a darling! That is no common spirit. That heart of hers is hard to bind, and they would hold it with a Quaker stillness! That seeking mind of hers, which shocks her own demureness! Oh, M'Mary, she is a *human angel!*

MARY: Most truly, I think, you've lost your heart to her.

CHARLES [*wistfully*]: I wish I dared tell her so.

[GEORGE DYER *comes limping along the street from* L.]

MARY [*catching sight of him as he passes the windows*]: Why, here's George Dyer back again!

CHARLES [*as* DYER *appears in the open doorway*]: Well, George—you woman-hater—M'Miss Mischief has flown!

DYER: I saw her go, Mr. Lamb, and ventured to return. I think—abd-abd-abd—I think I have left one of my shoes behind me.

MARY: And I never noticed it! And there it stood on the chimneypiece like a queer kind of ornament! What strange people Miss Savory must have thought us. [*She fetches shoe from mantelpiece.*] Why, have you lost your buckle? Dear, dear, fancy tying it up with string! Oh, George, it's plain you want a woman to look after you!

DYER [*mildly, blinking hard*]: God forbid!

MARY: Well, well, sit down, George, and put on your shoe, or you will be forgetting it again.

CHARLES: I'll walk a couple of pints with you, George.

DYER [*putting on his shoe*]: A—a couple of pints, Mr. Lamb?

CHARLES: I reckon my m'mileage by Ale and Beer Measure. I'll walk two pints with you, and you shall share in the stake. [*To* MARY.] My hat and t'toga, foul wretch!

[MARY *goes into the inner room* L.]

CHARLES [*in a hurried undertone to* DYER]: George—M'Mary is far from well—but tell her she is looking——[*Hearing* MARY—*urgently.*] *Don't m'muddle it, dear fellow, for God's sake!* [*Aloud.*] Ready, George?

[MARY *returns with* CHARLES's *hat and cloak; her face is very sad.*]

CHARLES [*with an anxious look at her*]: Ah, thanks, my blackamoor! Well, come along, George! [*Donning his cloak.*]

DYER [*fishing in his pocket*]: Ah—abd-abd-abd—here is the book I spoke of, Miss Mary. [*Takes out book.*]

MARY [*taking book from him*]: Thank you, George, I—I—it was very kind in you to think of me. [*Sitting wearily* L. *of table.*]

DYER: I am—I am happy to see you looking so well, dear Miss Mary. It says much for——

CHARLES [*almost too hurriedly*]: For the country air, eh, George? Why not walk with us, Mary? It might do you good.

MARY [*trying to speak lightly*]: No—no—I think I shall go and lie down for a bit.

CHARLES [*anxiously*]: Is the head bad again, Mary?

MARY [*without emphasis*]: It may pass. [*Rising.*] It may pass.

[*She goes out quickly* L., *leaving the door open.* CHARLES *goes to the door, stands for a moment looking after her, then closes it quietly. He turns and looks at* DYER, *his face tragic.*

COLERIDGE *passes the windows.*]

DYER [*trying to comfort* CHARLES]: It might pass—as Miss Mary said—yes, it might—mightn't it?

CHARLES [*miserably*]: I—I'm afraid it won't.

[COLERIDGE *knocks.*]

Open the door, George.

[DYER *opens the door to* COLERIDGE, *who enters carrying a large carpet-bag.*]

COLERIDGE: Why, George—you here?

DYER: I—I am just going. Poor Miss Mary!

CHARLES: What brings *you* to Pentonville, Sam?

COLERIDGE: I'm afraid I've come at an inconvenient time, Charles. But I *must* see you.

CHARLES [*dully*]: Yes?

COLERIDGE: I want to talk to you—rather urgently. [*With a glance at* DYER.] We will speak of this later. I've had to leave my lodgings in Buckingham Street. I should like to be near you and Mary for awhile. Could I get a room in this neighbourhood?

CHARLES: Come to think of it, you might get one up the street where we used to lodge. I'll come with you and show you the house. Just let me look in on Mary. I can't help feeling worried about her. [*Exit* L.]

DYER [*picking up the carpet-bag which* COLERIDGE *has placed on the floor*]: Well, I'll bid you good morning, Mr. Coleridge. Don't wish to be in the way—don't wish to be in the way.

COLERIDGE: Here, George, that is my bag, if you please.

DYER: Oh no, Mr. Coleridge—abd-abd-abd—it is full of my books.

COLERIDGE: It is full of my clothing.

DYER [*surprised*]: Indeed, sir, indeed! [*Turning to table.*] Well, sir, but however——[*Sees the book he has given*

MARY *and takes it up.*] Ah yes, one of my books. I must not forget it. [*Opens bag and puts it in.*] Always forgetting something—always forgetting——

COLERIDGE: That is *my* bag, George.

DYER: Oh yes, Mr. Coleridge, oh yes. [*Puts the bag down on the floor.*]

[*Enter* CHARLES L.]

COLERIDGE: By the way, Charles, I met your old servant, Becky, in the street yesterday. She told me she was out of a situation. Why not have her back to look after Mary?

CHARLES: N'nothing in the world would induce me to! Why, we shouldn't be able to call our souls our own! Come along, old soldier, and let me find you a stable. [*Exeunt* CHARLES *and* COLERIDGE *to* R. DYER *is following them when he trips over the carpet-bag.*]

DYER: Ah yes, my bag! Always forgetting something—always forgetting something! [*Picking up carpet-bag, goes out, closing the door after him, and passing windows to* L.]

[*After a moment there comes a knock at the door* R. *Meeting with no response, the door is cautiously opened, and* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE *peeps in. Finding the room is untenanted, she enters boldly. She is a woman about forty, of an emphatic normality which distrusts the lack of it in others, regarding it as something to be feared. She goes to windows and looks out, but dissatisfied with the limited view she goes to door, opens it, and, pulling the door to behind her, stands surveying the street.*

She is thus screened from MARY, *who enters* L. *She has her hand to her head. She looks vaguely round the room, comes down to chest, opens it, and takes from it a strait-jacket. She looks at it as though realizing she ought to do something with it, but is uncertain what it is.*

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE *re-enters the room and is startled to find herself trapped. She catches sight of the strait-jacket, and shuts the door with a sharp click.*

MARY *turns, expecting* CHARLES, *then seeing* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE *gives a little cry and throws the jacket into the chest and shuts it with a slam.*]

MARY [*turning on* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE]: What are you doing here? What are you doing here?

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*somewhat frightened of her*]: I—I thought you were all out.

MARY [*more quietly, going to* L. *of table*]: You have no right to come up here like this, Mrs. Bracebridge. You have no right at all.

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE: Perhaps not, but——

MARY [*angrily*]: Go away!

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*summoning all her courage and coming down to above table*]: "Go away!" Miss Lamb—I'm very sorry, but—but that is what I must ask *you* to do, I'm afraid.

MARY: What—what do you mean?

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE: You have been living in my house some months now, and I—I like you and Mr. Lamb very much indeed. But I—[*her eyes fall to the chest, then come back again to* MARY'S *face*] I—I really think—— You see, Miss Lamb, I have my children to consider. I—I don't care to speak more plainly than that.

[MARY *stares at her in horror.*]

MARY [*tensely*]: What are you saying? What are you thinking? Your children! My God, my God! Are you trying to say that I might hurt *your children?* [*The tears come into her eyes at this terrible thought.*]

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*greatly embarrassed*]: Miss Lamb—I—it's a dreadful thing to say, but I—— You see, I am new to the neighbourhood. I really knew nothing about you when you came to my house. If I *had* done I——

MARY: But you—you think that I could hurt a child—your children? Oh, I'm not a *beast!* I——

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*distressed*]: No, but you're not responsible—sometimes—for your actions. Oh, I ought not to be talking to you like this, I know. I ought to have spoken to your brother, but——

MARY [*suddenly fierce*]: But I caught you spying on us, and now you're trying to rend *me* to save *yourself!*

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE: That's not true. I've been thinking about this for some time now——

MARY [*wearily*]: Well, we—we must go away, then—that's all.

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*promptly—much relieved*]: Yes. By Lady Day, if you please.

MARY: Oh, but I don't understand. You—why, you've let us play with your children. You had no fear *then*. I—I wouldn't hurt a fly! Surely—surely you know that!

[CHARLES *enters and comes straight to* MARY *below table*. MARY *throws her arms about him*.]

Charles! Charles! She's afraid for her children! She thinks I'll hurt them!

CHARLES [*quietly*]: What is this, Mrs. Bracebridge?

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE [*very uncomfortable at being confronted by* CHARLES]: I'm very sorry, sir—but—I think you will understand. I——

MARY [*sobbing on* CHARLES's *shoulder*]: We are to go away from here. She—she will not have us any more.

CHARLES [*with quiet firmness*]: Very well. We will not t'trouble you any further—thank you, ma'am.

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE: I really am sorry, sir, but I have to consider others——

CHARLES [*more firmly*]: Certainly. Thank you. That will do.

MRS. BRACEBRIDGE: If I was the only one concerned——

CHARLES [*thundering*]: Th'that will do!

[*Hastily* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE *withdraws* R.

CHARLES *takes* MARY *to sofa and seats himself beside her. He takes her hand and presses his cheek against hers, and thus they stay for a moment in desolate silence*.]

MARY [*brokenly, at last*]: Oh, Charlie, I'm afraid we shall always be *marked people!*

CHARLES [*gently*]: Only to those who don't know us, M'Mary. Our friends will always love us with s-ympathy and understanding. D'don't think of it, my dear, any more. [*Trying to hearten her.*] We'd already decided to go and live in London—do you remember?

MARY [*utterly breaking down*]: Oh, Charlie! She was afraid for—for *her children!* It's that that hurts—not—not leaving *here.*

CHARLES: She doesn't know you, my dear. She doesn't know you.

[MARY *buries her face in her hands.*]

CHARLES: Is the pain *very* bad, M'Mary?

MARY: Oh God—it's an agony!

CHARLES [*putting his arm about her*]: Oh, my dear, my *d'dear!*

[*They sit for a moment in silence.*]

MARY [*at last, looking at him with strange insistence*]: I—I think I must go away again—to—to the mad-house. That—oh, that cruel woman has put such terrible thoughts in my head! I—I'm frightened! Jesus, Jesus—remember poor Mary in all her afflictions!

[CHARLES *kisses her, then rises and quietly takes her bonnet and shawl from the hook. In these he dresses her,* MARY *sobbing under her breath as he does so.* MARY *rises and gazes forlornly round the home she is leaving. She touches, very lovingly,* CHARLES'S *papers on the table, and then her eyes fall on* HESTER'S *posy, and her sobs grow a little quieter. She takes it up, and with* CHARLES'S *arm about her shoulders, she goes to door. At the door she pauses.*]

MARY [*leaning against the lintel and vaguely pointing with her hand*]: We must—take—the jacket, Charlie.

[*Without a word,* CHARLES *comes down to the chest and takes out the strait-jacket. He folds it hastily and hides it under his cloak. Then he returns to* MARY, *who is sobbing more loudly again, and puts his arm about her.*]

CHARLES [*trying to control his tears*]: C'courage, sweetheart.

MARY [*with tremulous bravery*]: Yes, Charlie!

[*He leads her out, quietly closing the door after them, and hand in hand they pass the windows, their heads bent. They are crying.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The Scene is the same, later the same day.

The fire is out, and in the half-light the room looks gloomy and cheerless. Outside in the street the houses are beginning to show a varied relief under the winter moon.

When CURTAIN RISES *the Stage is empty. After a moment* CHARLES *comes slowly along the street from* L. *He opens the door and enters. Having closed the door, he stands with his back to it, gazing about him at the desolate room. He comes slowly down to the fireplace and lights the candles by the aid of a small tinder-box.*

CHARLES [*shuddering, as he looks down at the dead fire*]: Ah, yi, yi! It's c'cold!

[*He throws off his hat and goes to door* R., *clears his throat nervously, than calls:*]

Ah—M'Mrs. Bracebridge!

[*No answer.*]

[*Then, more loudly.*] M'Mistress Braceb'bridge!

[*No answer.*]

[*He closes the door, comes back and goes over to the coal-scuttle. He looks in it, and, with an exclamation of satisfaction, takes out two small pieces of wood. Then he goes to table and tears a couple of pages from a manuscript book. With these and the wood he proceeds to start a fire, bringing it to a blaze with the help of a pair of bellows. He places some large logs on the flame, then sits on the sofa and watches it for a moment, his face shadowed by sadness.*

HESTER *knocks.* CHARLES *turns his head wearily towards the door, but makes no attempt to open it.* HESTER *knocks again, and then* CHARLES *goes swiftly and opens it.* HESTER *is carrying a basket of eggs.*]

HESTER [*curtsying*]: If thee please, sir, mother sends these eggs for Miss Lamb. I would have come before, but the eggs are hard to find—our hens are broody.

CHARLES [*trying to speak naturally, though his voice sounds muffled, and he keeps his face turned from her*]: That is

very kind of your mother, M'Miss Savory. Will you step inside a moment, while I take the eggs from the b'basket?

[HESTER *comes in and* CHARLES *closes the door after her.*]

HESTER [*seeing the newly made fire*]: Is thy sister not at home, sir?

CHARLES: N'not—not at present.

HESTER [*eyeing him with grave sympathy*]: I think thou art in great trouble, friend. Thou—thou hast been weeping.

CHARLES: I—I have a d'dulling cold—that is all.

HESTER: That, I think, sir, is a brave falsehood to hide a sorrowful truth.

CHARLES [*trying to smile*]: Your eyes see too clearly, Miss Hester. [*Then, almost breaking down.*] I—the t'truth is—M'Mary——[*He cannot continue.*]

HESTER: Is she here? Can I do anything for her?

CHARLES: No—n'no, thank you. I—I have taken her away—'tis—'tis kind of you—I—I feel a widowed soul without her.

HESTER: This room is sad and chilly. Wouldst thou not come to my home for awhile? Mother would welcome thee, friend, I know.

CHARLES: I—I should be such poor company—I'd be ashamed.

HESTER: No one is stressed to be "good company" in *our* house. We believe in the *quietness* of friendship.

CHARLES [*his voice breaking*]: Oh, that I long for!—quietness—peace!

HESTER: Then—then thou wilt come?

CHARLES: S-ome other time—if you will but ask me. To-day I am best alone. But I am greatly t'touched by your kindness.

HESTER: I wish I knew how to speak comfort.

CHARLES: Your presence here is enough—and your thought for us. [*Looking about him.*] Yes, this room is sad and gloomy. [*Smiling at her.*] I will be a s-pend-thrift with the candles to make it gayer. [*He lights two more of the candles on the mantelpiece and carries them to table.*]

HESTER: We shall be unhappy, thinking of you all alone this evening.

CHARLES [*with forced gaiety*]: But I shall work! Think of me, rather, p'ploughing a quill across a clean white page.

HESTER: Thou art engaged upon some writing *now?* What is it, friend? An essay?

CHARLES [*at the table, turning over the leaves of his manuscript book*]: That is too dignified a name for it. This is—oh, a mere trifle—a sort of reverie. I have called it—"Dream Children". B'but Heaven knows if it will come to anything!

HESTER: "Dream Children." There is an echo of—of sadness about it.

CHARLES: Well—'tis an antidote to loneliness—dreaming of children one can never have. [*He stands looking at her very intently.*] M'Miss Hester—would you—dare I ask you to—to do something for me? It—the request may sound odd—but if you *would*——

HESTER: What is it, friend?

CHARLES [*shyly*]: You—you will think it st-upid of me——

HESTER: Never fear!—if it will soothe thy grief.

CHARLES [*smiling at her a little wistfully*]: I—I am going to sit down and write at my table. Will you—would you—just for one m'moment—take off your bonnet and sit by my fire as—as if you were at home?

[HESTER *shyly unties her bonnet, while* CHARLES *devours her with his eyes. He takes the bonnet from her, and in doing so catches her hand.*]

CHARLES [*in a strangled voice*]: Miss Hester, I—I——

[*He breaks off as their eyes meet. Her gaze presently falls before his, her head droops.* CHARLES *seems about to speak, to take her in his arms, but after a moment he conquers himself and speaks pleadingly, but with difficulty.*]

CHARLES: Just for a moment, sit there by the fire as though—as though this were your home.

[HESTER *goes quietly and seats herself on the sofa, clasping her hands in her lap.* CHARLES *watches her; then,*

when she is seated, he sinks into the chair above table, takes up his pen, but his eyes never leave her face. Music is heard in the near distance—"There is a Lady".]

HESTER [*after a moment, trying to control her emotion*]: Is that a sacred song that they play it on the Sabbath?

CHARLES [*with a twisted smile*]: Sacred? Perhaps. [*Then quietly, but the words are a declaration.*] "I did but see her passing by—And yet I love her till I die."

[HESTER'S *eyes meet his and betray their own secret. The music ends, and* CHARLES *suddenly buries his face in his hands. After a moment* HESTER *rises and goes to him, but hesitatingly.*]

HESTER [*looking down at him*]: *Dear* friend, I wish——

[*Then her eyes drop to his work.*] "Dream Children."

[*Suddenly, half crying, she puts her hand on his shoulder.*] Oh, thou poor lonely soul!

CHARLES [*in a muffled voice*]: Take your dear hand away!

[HESTER'S *hand falls to her side.*]

HESTER [*after a moment*]: I think—I think God meant thou shouldst marry and—and have children of thy own.

[CHARLES *rises suddenly to his feet and stands partly turned away from her, struggling with himself not to turn and clasp her to him. She half raises her arms to him.*]

CHARLES: Don't you see—marriage for me is not—not possible.

[HESTER'S *arms fall to her sides.*]

M'my children can never be anything but—dream children. There's—there's the taint of madness in my blood. I—I can never ask any woman to—to share this curse with me!

HESTER [*striving to keep back her tears*]: Thou dost choose a lonely path.

CHARLES [*almost harshly*]: Choose! Only the devil of loneliness suggests that there *is* any choice!

HESTER: Friend, I think—I think God will reward—thy courage. [*She walks over to the fireplace—rather miserably.*] My heart misgives me. Thou must condemn me as—as immodest, to have—to have spoken so freely of thy affairs.

CHARLES [*turning sharply*]: You shall not shame yourself with such a thought, when I—when I am so grateful —*so grateful* for your—kindness.

HESTER [*turning to him with a sad little smile*]: Kindness! And I am forgetting thou art a tired and hungry man. Friend, hast thou had any dinner?

CHARLES [*trying to return her smile*]: N'no. I have a frog in my throat.

HESTER: Then thou must eat all of the eggs. May I take them out of the basket? What shall I put them in?

CHARLES: I will fetch a dish.

HESTER: And thou shouldst put the kettle on for some tea. I think thee needs nourishment.

CHARLES [*half in sad play, half in earnest*]: M'madam—your most obedient. [*Exit* R.]

[*The next moment* DUDLEY *passes the windows.* HESTER *goes quickly and taps to call his attention. He looks in in surprise, and* HESTER *goes and opens the door to him. He has a magazine under his arm. In his surprise he leaves the door half open.*]

DUDLEY [*annoyed*]: Hester, child—what are you doing here?

HESTER [*seeing no cause for offence*]: I brought some eggs for Miss Lamb. But, alas! poor soul, her brother has had to take her away again.

DUDLEY: But *you*—here—alone—and without your bonnet! My darling, is this wise?

HESTER [*gravely*]: Mr. Dudley, thou shouldst not question the *manner* of an act of kindness.

DUDLEY: Kindness? [*Jealously.*] Is that all?

HESTER [*proudly*]: Sir!

DUDLEY: As your betrothed I have a right to question.

HESTER: Mr. Dudley, thou art the husband my parents have chosen for me. My own word I have not yet given.

DUDLEY [*eagerly yet indulgently*]: But you *will*, my dearest?

[HESTER *looks away from him towards the table where* CHARLES *has been sitting. Then with a sigh she looks back at* DUDLEY.]

HESTER [*with sad resignation*]: Cousin, I have never yet been wanting in—obedience.

DUDLEY [*suddenly catching her in his arms*]: Oh, my sweet! [*He kisses her, but she remains passive.*] My little shy angel!

[CHARLES *returns with a small basin and a kettle. He is palpably surprised and hurt by the sight of* HESTER *in* DUDLEY'S *arms, and seems to hesitate whether or not to retire, but before he can beat a retreat,* DUDLEY *turns.*]

DUDLEY [*slightly confused*]: I—I ask your pardon, Mr. Lamb. I—I find you are already acquainted with my betrothed.

HESTER [*with strange quietness*]: I invited him in, friend—thou must excuse me. He was passing on his way to our house, and I thought it would be wiser to go with him. But please let me put the kettle on the hob. [*Takes kettle from* CHARLES *and crosses to the fireplace.*]

CHARLES [*finding his voice at last, as he puts the basin on the table*]: I—I did not know, sir—that you and Miss Savory were——

[*His eyes meet* HESTER'S.]

DUDLEY: I am a relation of Miss Savory's mother, sir. We have been destined for each other from our cradles.

CHARLES [*still looking at* HESTER, *hardly aware that he is speaking*]: And—and Miss Savory has—has accepted——?

DUDLEY [*in surprise*]: Why yes, sir, naturally.

HESTER [*half under her breath*]: Only now—but *now*——

DUDLEY [*sharply*]: Hester, my dear, this—to a stranger!

HESTER: A friend, Mr. Dudley. [*With secret stress as she keeps her eyes on* CHARLES.] A friend—I hope—*always.*

CHARLES [*bowing*]: I shall be very grateful—for—your friendship. [*Looking at* DUDLEY.] With—your husband's permission.

DUDLEY [*with a superior smile*]: Hester will have many friends in her married life, but you, Mr. Lamb, may certainly be one of them. [*To* HESTER.] Well, come, my sweet. Pop on your bonnet and let me take you home.

HESTER: Oh, but first I must empty the basket.

CHARLES [*smiling at her sadly*]: I will do that while you don your bonnet.

[HESTER *puts on her bonnet.*]

DUDLEY [*during this*]: By the way, Mr. Lamb, I have been reading this Review as I came on the coach. You might like to see it. There is a personal attack on yourself, sir, which I feel you should answer. You can keep the magazine. I shall not want it again.

CHARLES: Thank you, sir. [*Turning to* HESTER.] It was kind in you to come, Miss Savory. My respects and thanks to your mother.

HESTER [*giving him her hand*]: Good day, Mr. Lamb.

CHARLES [*holding her hand*]: *Good-bye*—my—my b'best—*very* best wishes for your happiness.

HESTER: I thank thee, friend.

CHARLES: And to you, too, Mr. Dudley.

DUDLEY: Thank you, sir.

[*Enter* COLERIDGE, *appearing in open doorway.*]

COLERIDGE: May I come in, Charles?

CHARLES: Why yes, Sam. Miss Savory, let me present Mr. Coleridge.

COLERIDGE: Your servant, ma'am. Servant, sir. [*Exchanges bows with* DUDLEY.]

DUDLEY: Come, my love.

HESTER [*curtsying*]: Good day, gentlemen.

DUDLEY [*bowing*]: Good day to you.

[*Bows from* CHARLES *and* COLERIDGE.

DUDLEY *leads* HESTER *to the door. As they reach it,* CHARLES *sees* HESTER'S *basket on the table and picks it up and takes it to her.*]

CHARLES: Miss Hester—here is your basket.

[*He gives her the basket, and as she takes it they exchange a long look of farewell.*]

DUDLEY [*unconsciously breaking in*]: A very good day to you, gentlemen.

[DUDLEY *leads* HESTER *out and off* R.

During this, COLERIDGE *comes down and sees magazine lying on the table. He takes it up and looks at it.*

CHARLES *closes door and comes down.*]

COLERIDGE: I should not read this article if I were you, Charles.

CHARLES: Why not, Sam? I've a thick skin—[*taking Review from him*].

COLERIDGE [*breaking out*]: The fellow must be made to apologize—publicly!

CHARLES [*finding the place*]: Is it as bad as all that?

COLERIDGE: Don't read it, my dear fellow. It can only distress you.

CHARLES [*reading*]: Oh, my God! . . . To describe my work as "the blasphemies of a maniac".

COLERIDGE: He doesn't know you. It was mere chance—an accident——

CHARLES [*breaking out*]: I might have been spared *that* particular accident!

COLERIDGE: You are too sensitive on the subject!

CHARLES: That word—maniac! God! One's courage cannot help but fail, when the blow falls on an open wound. Give me—just a moment—to get over this. One mustn't whine, you know.

[*He comes to the sofa and stands looking down for a moment at the place where* HESTER *has sat. Then he goes up to the window, and with his face pressed against the pane stands looking off in the direction of her house.*]

COLERIDGE [*going to him*]: I passed you and Mary in the street this afternoon. Oh, my poor gentle-hearted Charles!

CHARLES [*suddenly*]: Don't call me gentle-hearted! You do it in print, you speak of me thus to my friends. You make me feel so *puny!*

COLERIDGE: I'm sorry, Charles.

[CHARLES, *pulling himself together with an effort, comes and sits* L. *of table.*]

CHARLES [*quietly*]: Sam—you said this m'morning that you had something you wanted to ask me. What is it?

COLERIDGE [*pacing the room*]: Oh, I—I can't ask you *now.*

CHARLES: Why n'not?

COLERIDGE: Never mind.

CHARLES: Oh, come, Sam—there have never been any hesitations between us yet.

COLERIDGE [*dismissingly*]: No—you can't do it—so I'd rather not speak of it.

CHARLES: What is it?

COLERIDGE: Oh—well—— *No.* [*Then, as though playing with the idea.*] Charles—do they charge much for Mary—at—at that place?

CHARLES: Whatever it was I should pay it. [*Then, looking at* COLERIDGE *with sudden intentness.*] Oh—is it—m'money, Sam?

COLERIDGE [*in a muffled voice*]: Yes.

CHARLES: M'much?

COLERIDGE: Fifty pounds.

CHARLES [*unhappily*]: 'Tis—'tis rather a small fortune to *us!*

COLERIDGE: Yes, of course, but—— Oh, there have been promises here and there—this one will give me an annuity—that one will ask the King for a pension—but—well, promises do not come to fulfilment on oiled wheels!

CHARLES: No—I know they do not. [*After a moment.*] I—I will see what I can do—some mortgage on my salary, perhaps—— *Something.*

COLERIDGE [*bursting out*]: Oh, why don't you reproach me? Say I indulge myself with opium—that I neglect my wife and child—that I——

CHARLES [*with salutary sharpness*]: Sam!

COLERIDGE: Oh, it's true! What do you think I need the money for—except to go my own road to destruction? Why should you starve yourself for a friend who has been most awkward in his friendship, and so careless of his talents?

CHARLES: You would not ask me for the money unless you needed it badly.

COLERIDGE [*cynically*]: And I will pledge myself to repay you! [*Laughing harshly.*] I, a man of broken pledges—

pledges to friends—pledges to myself! Oh, Charles, my will is paralysed. What is to become of me? [*Wildly.*] Charles! What am I to do?

[*During this* CHARLES *has been quietly writing.*]

CHARLES: T'take this medicine.

COLERIDGE [*bitterly*]: Is *that* your help? The offer of a quack apothecary!

CHARLES [*smiling as he holds the paper in front of* COLERIDGE]: 'Tis very *good* medicine, sir.

COLERIDGE [*refusing to look at the paper*]: Drugs! You offer me drugs when I'm trying to get away from them!

CHARLES: This is no drug, Sam, but it's mighty good medicine.

COLERIDGE [*reading what* CHARLES *has written*]: "You cannot prevent the birds of sadness from flying over your head, but you *can* prevent them from building nests in your hair." [*Rising disconsolately.*] Well—you only are in a position to recommend such—medicine! [*Pacing the room.*]

[DYER *passes the windows.*]

CHARLES [*cheerfully*]: Look, the kettle has come aboil—shall it be a dish of tea or a nip of hot negus? [*Rises.*]

[DYER *bangs at the door.*]

CHARLES [*laughing*]: Well, whatever we have, here is a third to join us! [*Going to door.*] 'Tis never plain "Charles Lamb"—'tis always "C. Lamb *and Company!*"

[*He throws open the door, to disclose* GEORGE DYER, *a very sorry figure, standing on the step, clutching the carpet-bag.*]

DYER [*sneezing*]: Arasha! Arasha!

CHARLES [*smiling*]: Thank you, George. The same to you!

DYER [*entering*]: I—I don't know how it happened—but—abd-abd-abd—I was walking along—thinking—and I fell into a ditch!

CHARLES: The River Stinks, I imagine, George! [*Closing the door.*]

COLERIDGE: And with my bag! [*Throwing it on the floor.*] Faugh!

DYER [*half crying*]: I came all—all the way back—abd-abd-abd—because it was too far to go *on*! And—abd-abd-abd—I feel so *very* ill!

CHARLES [*touching his clothes*]: You don't feel wet, man.

DYER [*shaking as with an ague*]: No, I—abd-abd-abd—I've walked myself *dry*. But—but—but my feet feel as though I were still treading water. [*Sneezing again.*] Atasha!

CHARLES: Sit by the fire, George. I shall have to turn nursemaid, it seems. [*Taking kettle off the hob.*] Pull off the man's shoes and st-ockings, Sam. We must s-ouse him head and foot. [*Exit* R.]

COLERIDGE [*angrily*]: What the devil did you come back here for, George? Mary is ill again, and Charles has had as much as he can stand.

DYER [*miserably*]: Indeed—indeed, Mr. Coleridge, I—I know of no other house where I should be treated so kindly. But—abd-abd-abd—if it is not convenient—I—abd-abd-abd—I will go away again.

COLERIDGE: Well, I have no right to turn you out where I myself find harbourage. Off with your shoes and stockings, or Charles will have something to say to us! [*Removing shoes and stockings during this.*]

[BECKY *knocks.*]

COLERIDGE [*going to door*]: Well, pray God this is more *cheerful* company.

[*He opens the door, and* BECKY *enters, sobbing loudly, her face hidden in a vast handkerchief.*]

BECKY: Oh, Mr. Charles! Mr. Charles! I be in such great distress!

COLERIDGE [*distinctly annoyed*]: Becky! What do you want *here*, woman? You mustn't come worrying Mr. Lamb. He has troubles *enough* at the moment.

BECKY [*looking up at the sound of* COLERIDGE'S *voice*]: Oh, don't 'ee let 'im send me away, sir. Please beg 'im not to send me away. I—I've nowhere else to go!

[CHARLES *enters* R. *with wooden bucket full of hot water, and unsteadily carrying a tray containing a jug of hot negus and glasses. He comes to a shocked standstill at the sight of* BECKY.]

BECKY [*with tears gushing out afresh*]: Oh, Mr. Charles!

CHARLES [*with a wry smile*]: Why, Becky! What are *you* doing here? [*Puts tray unsteadily on table.*]

BECKY [*sobbing*]: I—I—I be out o' work, Mr. Charles—and I han't got any money—and I—I've walked yere to see if 'ee—if 'ee could do naught for me!

CHARLES: Oh dear, oh dear!

[BECKY *sobs louder than before.*]

COLERIDGE: For God's sake stop that noise, woman!

[BECKY *is terrified into silence.*]

CHARLES [*who has carried bucket over to* DYER]: N'now then, George, pop in your t'tootsies!

[DYER *tests with one foot the heat of the water, and* CHARLES *immediately pushes it right in.*]

In you go!

COLERIDGE [*to* BECKY, *taking her aside*]: You really mustn't come worrying here, my good woman. Miss Mary has had to go away again, and——

CHARLES [*turning and smiling at him*]: Mary will come back again soon, please God. There is that to live for.

BECKY: Oh, poor Miss Mary. Be ye wanting a servant, Mr. Charles? I—I be out of work! I—I'll 'ave to go begging if 'ee don't 'ave me. And I—I do—I did always look after 'ee well, sir!

CHARLES [*with a wry smile*]: Yes, Becky—by *force*, I remember.

BECKY: Oh, please—please, will 'ee 'ave me yere?

DYER [*shaking with ague*]: Ah yi, yi!—Ah yi, yi!

COLERIDGE [*bullying* BECKY]: What in thunder made you come worrying here just now, woman!

[BECKY, *above table, suddenly drops on her knees, flinging her arms wide, drops her head upon them and starts sobbing again.*]

DYER [*as before*]: Ah yi, yi!

[CHARLES *goes to chair* L. *of table and sits.*]

CHARLES: B'Becky!

[BECKY *does not answer, but her sobbing is not quite so loud.*]

B'Becky!

[BECKY *drops to silence.*]

Will you begin my service by handing round the negus?

[BECKY *jumps to her feet, her face radiant.*]

BECKY: Oh, Mr. Charles!

[*She hastily pours out the negus and hands it round, first to* COLERIDGE.]

BECKY [*as she does so*]: You won't regret it—I swear it on my life, Mr. Charles! I'll look after 'ee so well, 'ee won't 'ave scarcely even to breathe!

CHARLES [*ruefully*]: Have mercy on me, Becky!

DYER [*taking his glass from* BECKY]: Ah yi, yi, yi! Thank you, mistress. Ah yi, yi!

CHARLES [*taking his glass*]: Thank you, Becky!

[CHARLES *catches sight of* DUDLEY, *with* HESTER *on his arm, passing the right-hand window. He rises and takes a step towards them.*]

CHARLES [*under his breath*]: How happy he looks!

COLERIDGE: Happy? Who looks happy, in God's name?

CHARLES: Someone—passing the window.

[*He looks round the more unhappy friends within the room and raises his glass to them. The music is heard faintly in the distance, "There is a Lady".*]

Well—God almighty bless us!

[DUDLEY *and* HESTER *pass the left-hand window, and as they do so* HESTER *turns her head and glances in, with a look of farewell. Seeing this,* CHARLES *raises his glass to her.*]

[*Quietly.*] And—*all of us!*

COLERIDGE: And all of us!

DYER [*standing up in the bucket*]: And all of us!

[*To the swelling music* THE CURTAIN FALLS.]

END OF ACT III.

EPILOGUE

As the light gradually grows upon the Scene of the Prologue:

CHARLES: . . . Yes, that is the hardest thing of all—to accept the commonplace with fortitude, while Romance passes one by. [*Then, seeing* MARY's *saddened face, he pats her hand.*] Well, well, here we sit, M'Mary, you and I—an old maid and an old bachelor—writing our Great Works—happy in our double singleness.

MARY: Ah, Charles, how many of your "parched lands" have gone to make my "green pastures"! Where should I be now without *you*? Gone long since. When I remember all the years of love you've given me, I comfort myself with the thought that, perhaps, in giving me *your* life, you have made mine—*and* your own. That, perhaps—don't smile at me!—we may have written things that will make people think of us with affection.

CHARLES [*smiling, but a little wistfully*]: I think posterity will find *our* immortality has only one m, M'Mary. No, my love, Fame is not our portion.

MARY: Ah—I think your fame will knock gently at people's hearts and make them love you for what you were once——

CHARLES: Just—a funny little m'man who stammered and made puns, and sometimes got d'drunk.

MARY [*valiant in his defence*]: Yes—a funny little man who faced life with courage when his heart was breaking—who was an angel brother and a loving friend!

CHARLES [*gravely*]: M'Mary, will you write me a testimonial for posterity? I m'may need one. And never mind the spelling!

MARY [*quickly*]: The spelling? Oh! [*Looking down at her page.*] Does the blot hide it, do you think?

CHARLES: Yes, the truth is obscured by the inkwell—as usual.

[MARY *takes a noisy pinch of snuff and hands her snuff-box to* CHARLES, *who also takes a pinch.*]

CHARLES: Now, my love, we will continue our Great Works, and win some more I-mortality. Then we will have a little warming-time by the fire over our t'tea.

[*They both take up their pens and proceed to write in busy contentment, which* MARY *interrupts by a sneeze as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

on the

END OF THE PLAY.]

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